GHOST RIDER

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

Inside the Ghost Rider Movie with
Director Mark Steven Johnson and Nicolas Cage

Ghost Rider Inside and Out with:
Garth Ennis • Clayton Crain • Daniel Way
Javier Saltares • Mike Ploog • Roy Thomas *and More!*

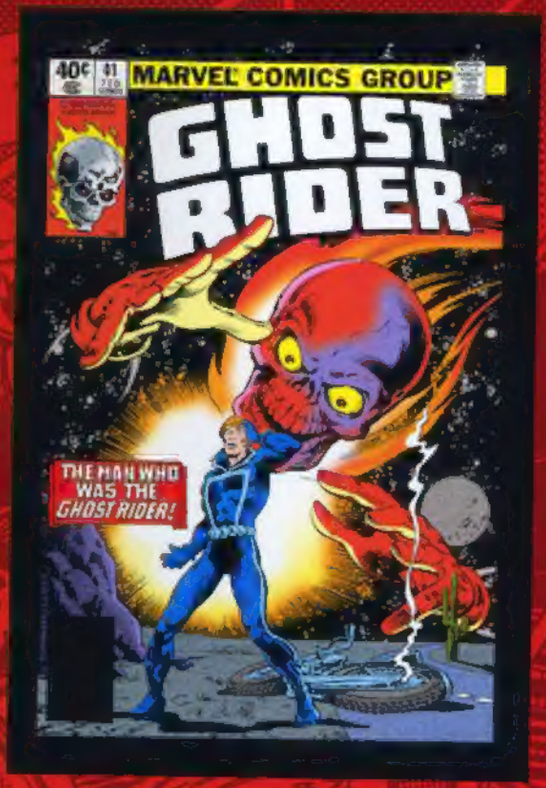
DIRECT EDITION

$2.99 US $3.75 CAN

RATED T+

PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

GHOST RIDER



I: Spotlight Front Page
Get up to speed on current Ghost Rider comics and trades!

II: Ghost Rider Movie Coverage
Interviews with director Mark Steven Johnson and actor Nicolas Cage of the upcoming Ghost Rider film, debuting in February 2007!

III: The Road to Damnation, The Trail of Tears
Inside the mini-series that brought Johnny Blaze back to life, with series creators Garth Ennis and Clayton Crain. Plus, a special preview of their upcoming mini-series *Ghost Rider: Trail of Tears!*

IV: Ghost Rider Returns: The New Series
Spotlight catches up with Daniel Way, the writer tasked with picking up the action after the events of *Road to Damnation* in GR's new hit series! With preview art of the upcoming two-parter with guest pencils by the legendary Richard Corben!

V: The Art of Ghost Rider with Javier Saltares
Few are as intimately involved with the world of the Ghost Rider and its many different visual looks as artist Javier Saltares. *Spotlight* catches up with the artist, discussing both his past work on Danny Ketch-era GR tales and his current work with Daniel Way! Plus, a special gallery of rare and never-before-seen GR pencil art!

VI: The Origins of Ghost Rider
Spotlight had the incredible honor of talking with two of the co-creators of Ghost Rider, editor Roy Thomas and artist Mike Ploog, where we looked back thirty-five years ago to the debut of our favorite hell cyclist!

VII: Ghost Rider...With A Ketch!
Writer Howard Mackie is on hand to reminisce about the '90s version of Ghost Rider!

Head Writer/Coordinator: John Rhett Thomas
Spotlight Bullpen Writers: Dugan Trodglen, Matt Adler
Transcriptions: Maria Incardona
Editor: Jeff Youngquist
Associate Editors: Jennifer Grünwald & Mark D. Beazley
Assistant Editor: Michael Short
Vice President of Sales: David Gabriel
Layout: BLAMMO! Content & Design, Jerry Farmer
Vice President of Creative: Tom Marvelli
Editor in Chief: Joe Quesada
Publisher: Dan Buckley

Special thanks to Lee Emmel.

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT: GHOST RIDER. First printing 2006. Published by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Copyright © 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. $2.99 per copy in the U.S. and $3.75 in Canada (GST #R127032852) in the direct market and $3.99 per copy in the U.S. and $5.75 in Canada (GST #R127032852) through the newsstand; Canadian Agreement #40668537. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. **Printed in the U.S.A.** ALAN FINE, President & CEO Of Marvel Toys and Marvel Publishing, Inc.; DAVID BOGART, VP Of Publishing Operations; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIE, Managing Editor; STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact Joe Maimone, Advertising Director, at jmaimone@marvel.com or 212-576-8534. 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Ghost Rider, the Motion Picture Copyright 2006 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The views and opinions expressed in each issue of Marvel Spotlight are solely those of the writers, commentators or creative talent and do not express or imply the views or opinions of Marvel Entertainment, Inc.

SPOTLIGHT ON GHOST RIDER

He's the mortal soul consigned to a life between Hell and Earth, a good-hearted person who made a foolhardy choice and now must pay the price for it. But with the paying of that price came great power, and it is the determination to wield that power to protect innocents from his same fate that sets Ghost Rider apart from the demons who want to take him down – and there is no rest for Ghost Rider, for they always want to take him down!

He's been incredibly popular for periods of time over the last 35 years since his first appearance in *Marvel Spotlight #5* back in 1972. The original Johnny Blaze incarnation of the character went on for 12 years and 81 issues of his regular title before being cancelled and lying dormant until 1990, when the character was revived in a new ongoing series that was even more popular than the first one! At the close of the decade, however, that series fell apart amidst the trauma of Marvel's corporate financial problems at the time, and Ghost Rider, like Shane, once again rode off into the distance, his fans left waiting eagerly for his return.

That time is now. Ghost Rider is back and more popular than ever. The character that established itself as a cult favorite in comics will now enter the public consciousness in February 2007 with a major motion picture starring Nicolas Cage. And the character has never had his comic adventures in better hands than they are now, with legends like Garth Ennis, Richard Corben and all-time great GR team Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira, as well as brash new upstarts like Daniel Way and Clayton Crain, all combining together to lend their talents to some incredible new stories!

Thanks for joining us in this special issue of Marvel Spotlight, dealing solely with ol' Flamehead himself, Ghost Rider! Now let's kick this bike into action and get to riding!

VITAL STATISTICS:

Character: Ghost Rider
Current identity: Johnny Blaze
Former identities: Danny Ketch, Noble Kale
Key group affiliations: Champions, Midnight Sons
Current ongoing title: Ghost Rider by Daniel Way, Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira
Movie opening: February 2007

UPCOMING COMICS:

GHOST RIDER: TRAIL OF TEARS

This six-issue mini-series by Road to Damnation team Garth Ennis and Clayton Crain dials the Ghost Rider legend back to the Old West. This is one comic people will be talking about!

GHOST RIDER #6-7

The next two issues of Ghost Rider by Daniel Way are pivotal reading for those who want to know all about the Death of Johnny Blaze, with art by renowned comic illustrator Richard Corben!

GHOST RIDER: FINALE

The story you've been waiting ten years for, collected in this 72-page one-shot!

MYTHOS: GHOST RIDER

Writer Paul Jenkins and painter Paulo Rivera bring the Ghost Rider myth into focus in this 32 page book due in January.

COLLECT 'EM IN TRADE:

1970s-80s:

ESSENTIAL GHOST RIDER VOL. 1-2

These highly affordable, super-duper giant-sized collections are bringing the earliest tales of Ghost Rider into print for the first time! Between the two of them, they collect the first fifty issues of the Ghost Rider title, plus all the origin stories from the Marvel Spotlight showcase anthology! Look for future volumes to seal the deal on a complete collection of Johnny Blaze Ghost Rider!

CHAMPIONS CLASSIC VOL. 1-2 TPB

All seventeen of the original issues of the Champions, plus assorted crossovers, are collected in these two, full-color trade paperbacks! Ghost Rider joins up with an unlikely collection of heroes that includes Hercules, Black Widow and the X-Men's Angel and Iceman!

GHOST RIDER TEAM-UP TPB

Collecting some of the many classic team-ups GR has had with Spider-Man, The Thing, The Avengers and more!

1990s:

GHOST RIDER: RESURRECTED TPB

Introducing Danny Ketch, the new Ghost Rider! The first seven issues of the classic '90s series by writer Howard Mackie and legendary GR art team Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira, are reprinted in this color trade paperback!

THE GHOST RIDER...TODAY!

THE ROAD TO DAMNATION HC/TPB

The outstanding revival of Johnny Blaze for the 21st Century by none other than Garth Ennis (Preacher, Punisher) and the glorious art of Clayton Crain, this story will leave you breathless as it reintroduces us to a character we've missed for a long time...and why? Because he's been in Hell! And as Ennis and Crain show us, Hell ain't exactly a nice place!

VICIOUS CYCLE TPB

If you haven't started reading the new, monthly ongoing Ghost Rider title by Daniel Way and the guys who own the modern look of the character, Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira, then Vicious Cycle is your chance to get right up to speed! Collecting the first five issues, you'll be relieved to find out Johnny Blaze is finally out of Hell...but only for a moment! You see, Johnny may be out of Hell, but so are a lot of other things along with him....and it all adds up to one of the most exciting comics Marvel is publishing today! Flameheads unite!

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH

MARK STEV

With the coming of the *Ghost Rider* film, *Marvel Spotlight* is set to cover the character from his origins in the 1970s all the way to what is going on in the pages of his comic today. There's no better time for ol' Flamehead to get this kind of coverage, because interest in Ghost Rider is at an all time high! And for our in-depth look into Marvel's blazing skull on wheels as he makes his transition to film, there's no better person to talk to than the man who wrote the script and is handling directing chores, Mark Steven Johnson. As the director of *Daredevil* (and even better, the *Daredevil: Director's Cut!*), Mark has an affinity for comics second to none in Hollywood, and a personal affection for Ghost Rider in particular that may only be rivaled by the star of the show, Nicolas Cage! He has a vision for this particular film that goes back to a time before any production meetings were set or any script treatments were written, back to when a little kid cultivated a sense of wonder from the colorful exploits of larger than life Marvel heroes.

Born in 1964, Mark grew up in the small town of Hastings, Minnesota, a little river town on the Mississippi, right outside of Minneapolis. It was there he developed a love of comics just like many other kids across the country did, rifling through the spinner racks of the local drug store, hoping for that latest copy of *Amazing Spider-Man* or *Fantastic Four* to complete his collection. The super-heroic characters that sprung out of the panels of those pages inspired him in ways he could have scarcely known at the time; they played no small part in his rise through the ranks of Hollywood to write and/or direct several films by the time he was forty (*Grumpy Old Men, Simon Birch, Daredevil*). But he could never have known, as an eight-year old boy clutching that copy of *Marvel Spotlight* featuring the premiere adventures of Ghost Rider, that he would be at the directorial helm of a feature film based on that very character that will be see by millions of people – most of whom will never have read the comic book it is based on!

I'm sure if I could have interviewed that little kid version of Mark, told him, "Hey, buddy, one day you'll be taking those drawings from those comic books and putting them up on screen," he'd have been as astonished as he was when reading about Johnny Blaze beating the devil one more time in the pages of *Ghost Rider*. He'd have said, "Coooo!!" *Spotlight* caught up with Mark at the Sony Studios in Hollywood as he put in another day editing the film in time for February release, and after getting to see some extended scenes from the film along with Mark, that's what the little kid in me was saying: "Coooool!!!!"

EN JOHNSON

SPOTLIGHT: Mark, you were a comics nut growing up, weren't you?

MARK: Oh yeah, I was obsessed with it just like you were. Nic Cage and I both learned to read reading comic books, and so as early as I can remember, from eight or nine years old, I started really reading them hardcore. By ten, I was at the drug store every week waiting for the comics to arrive. We didn't have a comic shop in the town I grew up in – it was too small – but at the drug store we got all the comic books!

SPOTLIGHT: So you were reading comics when *Ghost Rider* first started coming out? And did you read *Ghost Rider*?

MARK: Oh, absolutely. It was cool, because *Ghost Rider* was like those *Eerie* and *Creepy* comics. They were kinda forbidden because they were darker, and that was exciting back then. You realize that, even at ten years old, you were reading something that was a little darker than the usual Marvel fare! *(Laughter.)* I was hardcore into *Ghost Rider, Spider Man, Fantastic Four, Captain America, Thor*...all Marvel! I never really knew about DC. I knew about Superman but never read it until I was an adult. I never read Batman. It was a different world...apples and oranges.

SPOTLIGHT: How long did you read comics before you stopped reading them, or have you always read them?

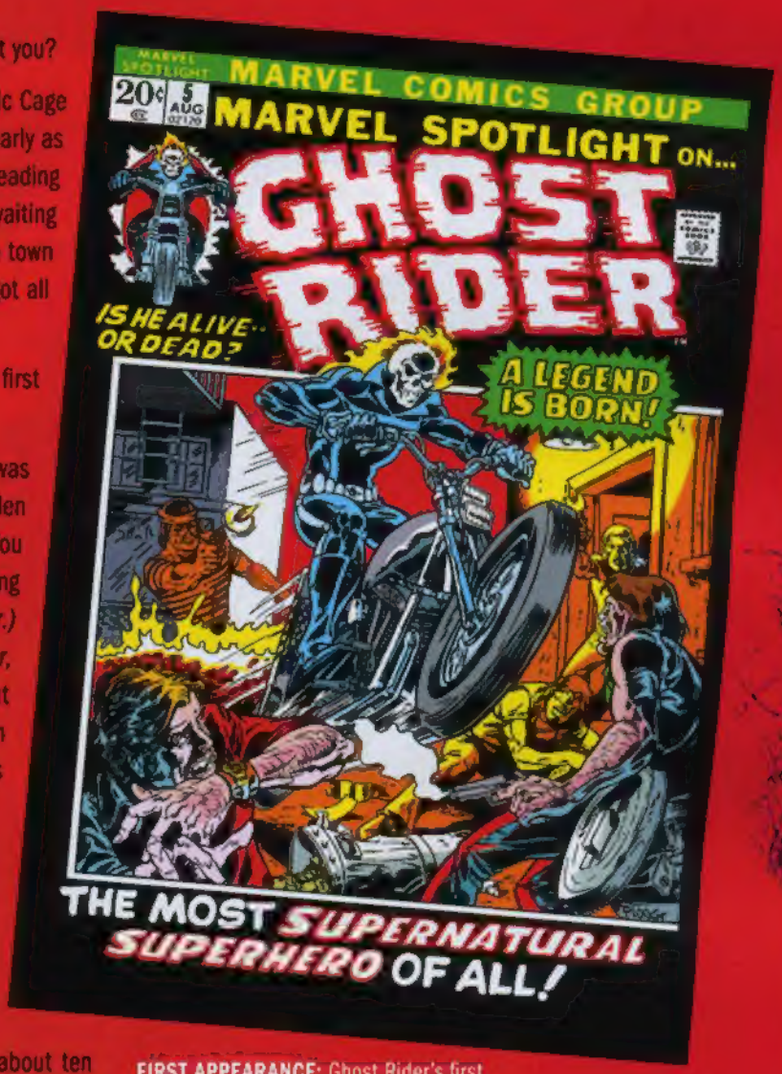
MARK: I read them up until college, and then I dropped off for a while. I think the books weren't quite as good then; they kinda took a dip and I think now they are back and stronger than ever. I got back into reading them probably about ten years ago and realize how much I missed it: going to the comics store every Wednesday, going to the shops and getting everything.

At the time, my dream was to make *Ghost Rider* and the rights were available. That's actually how I got into *Daredevil*, one of my favorite characters. But it was always Ghost Rider that I thought was the most visual of all the Marvel characters, the one that really belonged on screen, and the one that you couldn't have made ten years ago.

SPOTLIGHT: Certainly Ghost Rider's flaming skull would have been difficult to replicate!

MARK: An effect like that – you just couldn't do it. Making a flaming skull? You just couldn't do it.

SPOTLIGHT: There are a lot of correlations between the art form of comics and storyboarding for movies. Did your interest in comics as a kid translate to your interest in film in a way in which you were conscious of it?



FIRST APPEARANCE: Ghost Rider's first appearance in *Marvel Spotlight #5* (1972).

MARK: Yeah, absolutely! When I first got into movies and started looking at storyboards, I was like, "It's a comic book! I know how this works!" That's the way I'm used to reading anyway: panels and motion...and so storyboards really are a comic book come to life. Once you really understand that, and you get that through to everybody working for you on a film crew, then they all become not just more aware of what you are trying to accomplish, but they become comic fans. They really understand how this thing should look and feel. So between the storyboards and the concept art, that comic art is up on the wall. It's on my desktop. I always have that artwork up while we're shooting, and when someone comes along and says, "Why don't we do something like this?", I point to the art and say, "No. We're doing that! Ghost Rider, that's what he looks like, that's what we're going for."

ROAD TO DAMNATION: Clayton Crain's awesome rendition of Ghost Rider in Garth Ennis' *Ghost Rider: Road to Damnation.*

"GHOST RIDER WAS LIKE THOSE EERIE AND CREEPY COMICS...YOU REALIZE THAT, EVEN AT TEN YEARS OLD, YOU WERE READING SOMETHING THAT WAS A LITTLE DARKER THAN THE USUAL MARVEL FARE!"

I even have a shot up of the old western Ghost Rider going to the desert which is one of my favorite pieces of art by [concept artist] Crash McCreery. It has a tone to it and feel to it, and that's what you try to achieve. You're trying to achieve the art that all these comic artists slaved over all these years trying to bring it to life; especially this character.

SPOTLIGHT: Ghost Rider is certainly an iconic character, with not only the flaming skull but the bike. He comes from a period of time when Evel Knievel was a hugely popular stunt rider. All my friends had these Evel Knievel toys.

MARK: (*Mimics sound of Evel Knievel stunt toy revving up.*) I still have one in my office! I had the van and the ramps. It was fantastic. *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: Do you have any of those stunt biker loop de loops in the movie?

MARK: No, but we have two big jumps. The first one is a huge stadium jump where he jumps twenty trucks, and the second jump he jumps six helicopters from field goal to field goal in a football field, with the blades going, so if he doesn't make it, he'll get chopped to bits. *(Laughter.)* It's pretty great!

SPOTLIGHT: So do you still have all your own comic books from when you were a kid, or did you sell them off?

MARK: I sold them. We all get to that point where you need the money so bad, and at the time you tell yourself you'll get them all again, but you never do. You can never find the same ones sometimes. I had rooms full of them and I sold them all at a garage sale before I went to college unfortunately. But I still have all the essentials, the first issues of all my favorites. I'm not a huge collector, like keeping them in plastic wrap. I like touching them, I like reading them, I like smelling them. I like everything about comics. Putting them in a plastic bag and not being able to enjoy them is not me. I'd rather not worry about what grade they are and just be able to read them whenever I want.

SPOTLIGHT: One interesting thing about Ghost Rider is that he has had three major cycles of popularity: the '70s/80s version, and then the '90s version, both of which were hugely popular for a time. Now, you got out of comic books before they stopped publishing him in the '80s, so it seems logical that your movie is based more on the Johnny Blaze character then the Danny Ketch revival in the 90s?

MARK: It is Johnny Blaze, the original character; although having said that, Blackheart, The Caretaker, and the look of the Ghost Rider are more akin to the later Ghost Rider. I'm always a sucker for origins. I love the original stories. Some of the later stories are great too, but it's the art from the later comics that I loved. The look of the Ghost Rider was so great. Tex [artist Mark Texeira] and all those guys did such an incredible job.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of Texeira, I was going to ask if you had any particular artists whose visuals were inspirations for the designs you are using in the movie.

MARK: For sure, Tex. He's one of the first ones that comes to mind. Mike Ploog, one of the originals. Javier Saltares, those are all guys we had up on the board, whose work we all tried to emulate.

SPOTLIGHT: Ploog was the definitive guy because he did the first issues, and of course Saltares and Tex helped redefine Ghost Rider in the 90s and are back again doing the new comic with Daniel Way.

MARK STEVEN JOHNSON *continues on* **page 8**

ROXANNE SIMPSON: Johnny's girlfriend in Paulo Rivera's beautifully painted *Mythos: Ghost Rider*.

***SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW* WITH**

NICOLAS CAGE

Ghost Rider represents the crucible of life and death, where the positive choice for love and hope are melted and merged with the torture of pain and damnation. For Ghost Rider, one cannot exist without the other, and it is the clarity this inner struggle brings that helps him determine the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, hope and despair. After experiencing heaven on Earth and the pits of Hell, he's seen it all, and it's served him well when it comes to protecting innocents from the same damnation that keeps him forever on the run.

As for Nicolas Cage, he's not a regular reader of comics like he was when he was a kid (too busy keeping up a busy acting schedule), and he doesn't ride motorcycles like he used to (gotta set a good example for his kids, you see), and he *certainly* doesn't raise hell like he might have used to in his younger days! In these ways, he is very unlike the character he is playing in the upcoming film: a cult-classic comic book brought to life on the silver screen, Ghost Rider speeds down that highway in a one-way mission to raise – and wreck – hell...or die trying.

But for anyone who knows Ghost Rider like his longtime fans do, is there really any better actor on the scene that can represent this character's terribly noble fate than Nicolas Cage? One of his greatest assets as an actor is effortlessly exhibiting the qualities of the everyman that one can't help but root for, yet also being able to showcase the vulnerable frailties and world-weariness that leaves that same audience never really sure if he'll make it all the way through...but rooting him on nonetheless. It's the kind of tension he creates that has served him well across his career, from dark comedies like *Raising Arizona* and *Guarding Tess* to dramas like *Bringing Out the Dead*, *World Trade Center*, and his Academy Award-winning turn in *Leaving Las Vegas*. That kind of actor can really inhabit a character like Johnny Blaze, the Ghost Rider, and that's what we talked about in our *Spotlight* interview.

Nicolas Cage as Johnny Blaze.

SPOTLIGHT: Tell us a little about your comic fandom as a kid, when you were a young boy and you had sort of cut your teeth on reading comics. *Ghost Rider* was actually part of that reading experience for you, right?

NICOLAS: Yeah, for some reason I gravitated towards the monsters, because I couldn't understand and was compelled by the notion that these horrifying, scary figures were actually doing good. So I was immediately confused by it and fascinated by it. I liked the Hulk very much and I liked Ghost Rider. I look at those comics as sort of my introduction into reading and also, they stimulated my imagination and probably affected me directly as an actor; well, obviously because now I'm playing Ghost Rider!

In a way, it's sort of like reliving my childhood, and the movie plays quite a bit like a fairy tale, in all of the sort of scary aspects that the old fairy tales would have as cautionary tales of warning and fantasy.

SPOTLIGHT: How closely did you work with the production team to come up with the approach to the movie?

NICOLAS: Well, I was on board a long time ago, when I was still riding motorcycles, and I thought it would be great to bring him to life, and so I was very much a part of the writing process for the character. I had a lot of faith in Mark. I'd always felt he was an excellent writer, and when I saw his cut of *Daredevil* – the Director's Cut – I felt that he had made a good movie, so I did feel that in working with him we would be able to find a way to bring some life to this character. Since Ghost Rider is not as well known as some of the other characters in the Marvel Universe, I thought we'd have a little leeway to try to build upon and enhance the purest aspects of the story with my own take on how I could play the part, as if there was someone trying to keep darkness at bay and shut everything off as opposed to pouring fuel on the fire and inviting inside the evil that's lurking around the corner. Thankfully, Mark had faith in me and enabled me to work with him on creating a character that wouldn't be standard. That's what our goal was, to try and make something that would be fun to watch – because otherwise there would be no point in doing it, or repeating ourselves in any way.

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned how Ghost Rider is not as well known as the other Marvel characters, but certainly the character itself is as iconic as any character, with the flaming skull, the black leather and the bike. Mark knew that there was no way to bring this to the screen as recently as ten years ago, but with advances in special effects over the years, he's felt emboldened. Obviously you agree that it is time to bring Ghost Rider to the screen.

NICOLAS: I always felt that Ghost Rider was far and away the best super-hero for a translation to cinema hands down. The imagery is so iconic and so ancient. The flaming skull is an ancient symbol of honesty and truth, of not hiding one's feelings. The inevitable passing on of life, and yet there it is, ablaze, and it continues on... So it's a fantastic image. And the character is not wearing a cape, which many of the super-heroes wear. He's dressed head to toe in black jeans and a leather jacket, black leather pants, so it's a very easy translation to film because it's not goofy. It's got a rock and roll edge to it, which I think looks good on camera.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of looking good on camera, I got to see the transformation scene, which is certainly one of the key scenes in the movie, in the cutting room with Mark. We got to talk about some of the technical elements of that transformation, but you as an actor were operating on a whole different plane with that scene. How did that go down for you, working on that transformation from Johnny Blaze to Ghost Rider?

> "I ALWAYS FELT THAT GHOST RIDER WAS FAR AND AWAY THE BEST SUPER-HERO FOR A TRANSLATION TO CINEMA HANDS DOWN."

NICOLAS: One thing I wanted to make clear was that there was more than one emotion going on, that it wasn't just physical pain, although there was a lot of that, there's also ecstasy, this surge of power that is thrilling at the same time, a sort of this conflict between the joys of evil, and struggling against it, and then wanting to keep good in the balance. So there's a lot of pain involved in the transformation – physically and emotionally.

SPOTLIGHT: Mark also said your portrayal naturally tells a story about redemption and finding that second chance, even after you make a terrible mistake. How do you relate that back to the heroic element that most comic book films trade in?

NICOLAS: I think the heroic element is sort of how you take a negative and turn it into a positive. Johnny Blaze is cursed, and he made the wrong choice – but he did it out of love – and it makes him unpredictable. But that's what's heroic about the character: in the end he makes a choice to keeping it in a state of sacrifice so he can help others.

Thanks to Nicolas for squeezing in some time to talk with Spotlight between helping care for his newborn baby, Kal-El, and having to board a plane to Europe to shoot his next film!

Look for Ghost Rider starring Nicolas Cage as Johnny Blaze to open worldwide in February 2007!

MARK: And I think the most recent art that Clayton Crain is doing is gorgeous! It's just beautiful.

SPOTLIGHT: Yes, you should see the work that Crain has done of some Spiderman issues too which is just incredible [see *Sensational Spider-Man*]. So when approaching the movie, you've blended material from all the different eras. What percentage of the movie is origin set up?

MARK: That's actually under debate at the moment. *(Laughter.)* That's the last piece of the puzzle. The instinct is you always want to get your story started quicker, but I want to make sure we give it its due. My guess is back story origin is about ten minutes of the movie, somewhere around there. And then you meet Johnny Blaze as an adult and you see what his life has become and he turns into this Knievel-like eccentric character. And the idea that I like is that what happened to him as a kid when he made his deal with the devil, it's one of those things that as time goes on his life, he's not quite sure that it really happened. He's doubted all these years, but in the back of his mind he's always waited for that day that the devil might show up and say, "OK, now it's time. Now you work for me. It's time you make good on your end of the bargain." So that's what he's been dreading, and at the same time hoping that he gets a second chance that it won't happen. When Roxanne, his childhood love, shows up back in his life, he thinks this is a sign, "This means I'm going to get a second chance at life." Of course this is the same night the devil shows up!

SPOTLIGHT: The early *Ghost Rider* comics that spelled out his origin were so full of melodrama.

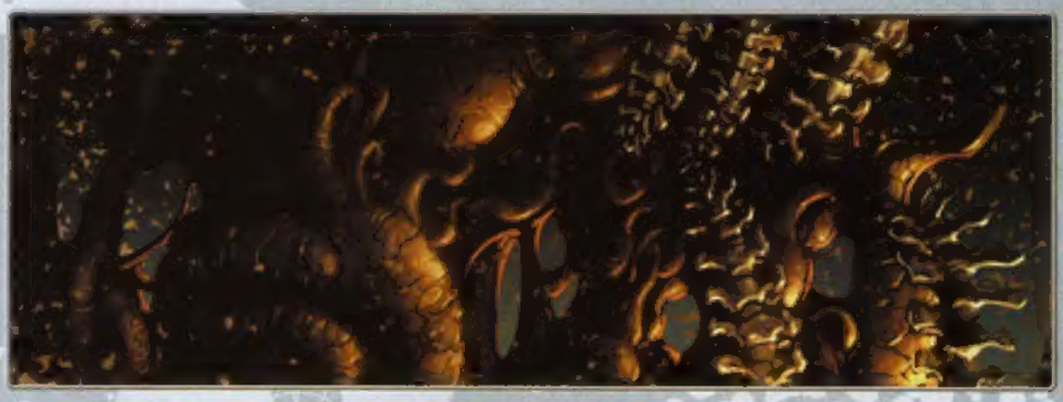
MARK: *(Laughter.)* The stories are great, but they're also of a certain period. I'm holding true to the origin of the Ghost Rider and staying really true to the look of the character. There are certain elements from the comic, like Roxanne coming in and you realize she's been studying the occult and she's suddenly putting a curse on the demon to stop it all, and you're like, "When did Roxy suddenly get into black magic and demon worship?!?!" *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: At the time, Marvel was coming free from some of the constraints of the Comics Code that restricted occult storylines, and I think that perhaps editorially they got a little carried away with it at that period of time.

MARK: They were. That end of it I think in some ways is what held *Ghost Rider* back. I think people are willing to go for some darker stories, but sometimes when they get too dark, they can collapse on themselves. It begins to feel like, "Everything is so dark, the character is so dark...who am I rooting for here?" And I think that's one of the things Ghost Rider has had to fight against. How can you have the darkness and stay true to what the movie is about, and at the same time have a character that can really be a hero?

SPOTLIGHT: Besides special effects, which this movie promises to deliver, you have to have an emotional center to the movie. With the main character of this film being Johnny Blaze, what is the single most important thing about his character that will play into your overall theme of the movie?

MARK: The single most important thing for Johnny Blaze is he's a man who's made a terrible mistake and he wants a second chance. I think that's a theme that everyone can relate to: everyone has messed up, everybody's done something really bad at one time. That's Johnny's story, that in the end, he sold his soul for love, and for that he's cursed. But that's not the same thing as selling your soul for money or for greed or fame. He didn't do that, he did it for a good reason.



More *Road to Damnation* art by Clayton Crain.

We have a line in the movie where the Caretaker says, "Maybe that puts God on your side." So in a way without saying it, without bringing God into the story, you do have a feeling that he's an avenging angel. He looks like hell – the scariest looking guy coming at you – he literally looks like hell! But actually, if you're not evil, he's out there to protect you. If you're evil? Forget about it. So I think the idea of second chances...

There's another line in the movie where Johnny says to himself, "You can't live in fear," and that's another big theme for his character and I think those are both things that everybody can relate to.

MARK: That's right, that's what they always had. They gave them real problems, life problems. And also they gave great Achilles heels.

SPOTLIGHT: What about the other cast members in the film? You have Roxy, who is played by Eva Mendes. In the comics, she's a golden haired little girl.

MARK: In the comics everyone's got blonde hair. *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: I don't think there's been one Marvel movie yet where the natural blonde has made the cut.

MARK: Isn't that funny? Like Jessica Alba playing Invisible Woman

"I LIKE EVERYTHING ABOUT COMICS. PUTTING THEM IN A PLASTIC BAG AND NOT BEING ABLE TO ENJOY THEM IS NOT ME. I'D RATHER NOT WORRY ABOUT WHAT GRADE THEY ARE AND JUST BE ABLE TO READ THEM WHENEVER I WANT."

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of things everybody can relate to, your description of Johnny Blaze right now seems like a perfect match for Nic Cage, the actor. As far as Nic Cage relating to the character you're describing, he seems to have all the assets necessary to pull it off. He can sell a lot of the things you're looking to establish in Johnny Blaze just by showing up.

MARK: I'm the biggest Nic Cage fan in the world. He can be so outrageous, which this character needs as well. There is a Jekyll and Hyde-ness to this character which I love. This isn't a rational person like Peter Parker who puts a mask on and jumps out the window to save the day. This is a guy who, when nighttime comes, he changes – it's like a wolf man story. He becomes this other creature. So I really wanted that Jekyll and Hyde, that dual identity, the kinda nice, gentlemanly, Texas boy Johnny Blaze and the monster that comes out. And Nic can play that, but he can also play such great comedy and the nuances and the emotion, and he is very tortured in this film. That's the part of it where you are really on his side. As crazy as this world gets, you always feel like, this is the guy I care about and I need to root him on because I don't know what's going to happen to him.

What I love about Ghost Rider, too, is that you always have that weakness. Actually, it was something that I really pushed in the movie that was in and out of the comics a bit, where I wanted to make him be only nocturnal. If you can be Ghost Rider all the time, it kinda takes away your vulnerability a bit. But when you have the ticking clock of the sun, I love that, because if that fight goes through the night and into the next day (which it does in our movie), what's gonna happen? He's gonna have to rely on Johnny Blaze as much as the Ghost Rider.

I think that was always my issue with Superman, I couldn't relate to it. He was so powerful; it's like bullets bouncing off his eyeball. You need somebody you gotta worry about.

SPOTLIGHT: That's what always separated Marvel from DC: early on, establishing the vulnerability in their heroic characters.

[in the Fantastic Four movie]. That's one of those things....the comics were made at a certain time and a lot of these came out in the '60s or the early '70s and everyone is white, there are no black people, and if they are their name is "Black" Something. *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: One of the earliest black Marvel heroes was Black Goliath, and they just killed him! [See Civil War.]

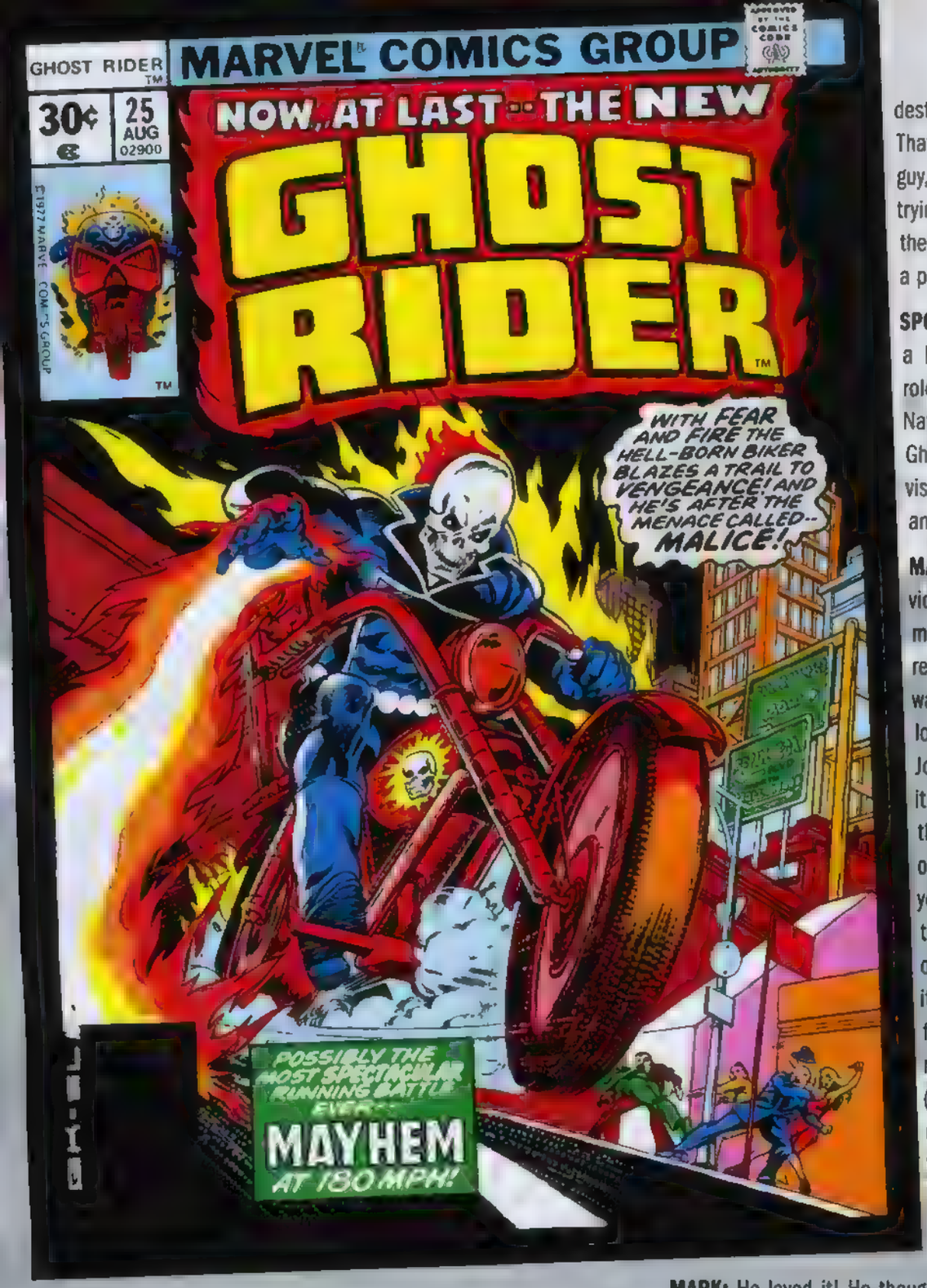
MARK: You see, there's no justice! *(Laughter.)* So for Eva I was looking for somebody beautiful, somebody likable - which is really rare - and someone funny, and people really just love her. She went with us to Comic-Con in San Diego, and the people there just went crazy for her! There's something about her that they just really like...besides the obvious! She's just likeable, somebody you root for. And also, setting this thing in Texas and making it go more "real world," having someone who's hispanic also makes it feel more real to me, not making it such a whitebread world.

SPOTLIGHT: Another addition to the cast is Wes Bentley, who was part of that incredible ensemble in American Beauty.

MARK: Yes, and he is playing Blackheart, which is a '90s-era villain. I've been a huge fan of Wes' since American Beauty. I thought that was one of the most heart breaking performances when he played that role. Since then, he's really been picky; he doesn't work that often. He's a real artist. I said I was gonna get him for this, and I remember somebody told me he would never do it. He passed on Spider-Man. He's always just shied away from this stuff. But I was going to try it anyway, and we just hit it off. He found a lot of appeal in this darker story, and to this issue of demons and good and evil, and both of his parents are ministers, so that was an interesting thing.

SPOTLIGHT: In the comic, Blackheart and Ghost Rider had some connection to each other as compatriots in Spirits of Vengeance. Does any of that enter into your story?

MARK: No. With all respect to the creators who did that story line (because I'm a big fan of it), I think it eventually got so convoluted



GHOST RIDER CLASSIC: A timelessly iconic cover from *Ghost Rider* #25.

at some point that they're coming up with Danny Ketch in the new Ghost Rider, and they're trying to relate him back to Johnny Blaze and then having to deal with Noble Kale, and...after a while if you go online and read just read the back story of Ghost Rider it goes on for five pages, and after a while, it's like I don't know what's going on anymore! I think it was trying too hard to make connective tissue where there didn't need to be any. No, I don't have that. In our story, Blackheart is the son of the devil, as he was in the comic. He's tired of waiting for the End of Days, which is when the Beast is supposed to arrive. He just tells us, "To hell with it, I want the end of days now. I'm not waiting for my dad anymore!"

Mephistopheles is played by Peter Fonda, which I thought was funny – going for the ultimate motorcycle icon for our motorcycle movie. What I liked about going with the Western vibe is the idea that it's like Fist Full of Dollars. Johnny's working for the devil, who he hates, but he has no choice. And the devil is saying, "Go find my son and destroy him. Bring his butt back to hell. That's your job." So he's chasing one bad guy, working for another bad guy and trying to find a way that he can outdo them both in the end. I thought that was a pretty interesting idea.

SPOTLIGHT: Peter Fonda is definitely a huge motorcycle icon, owing to his role as Captain America in Easy Rider. Naturally, motorcycles are a big deal in Ghost Rider: what went into creating the visual look for the actual motorcycles, and are you a motorcycle buff?

MARK: I am. I've got 3 Harley-Davidsons myself. Whenever I finish a movie, I go cross-country. That's my release. I've been riding ever since I was a little kid, that's why I've always loved this character. I wanted to give Johnny a chopper. In the back story, it's actually his father's motorcycle that his father gave to him as a rite of passage, his way of saying, "I love you, you're a man now." So Johnny has this chopper, which is an exact replica of the Captain America bike, except it's a different paint job. It's an old flame style job, but I wanted a little nod there for the motorcycle fans. (Actually when Mephistopheles shows up, he gives a little look and goes, "Nice bike.") *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: What did Peter think of that?

MARK: He loved it! He thought it was the greatest thing. He was joking on set saying, "This is the first movie cross over with Captain American in Ghost Rider." *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: So tell me more about the bike we'll see Johnny using in the film. How did your ideas about it develop over time?

MARK: We made this old style panhead chopper, and that's Johnny's bike. And when his bike transforms into the hell cycle, it was something I thought could be improved upon from the comic. I loved the look of the one from the comics, but I thought it could be better. The look of the Ghost Rider himself was so great, I just wanted to make that come to life and stay exactly true to the comic book. But the look of his bike was something I thought could be improved upon. So I did a lot of work with [*GR* concept artist] Crash McCreery on that, coming up with different looks for the bike.

I always liked that the Batmobile looked like Batman, I loved that the shape is an extension of his batlike qualities. And we wanted the hell cycle to actually look like Ghost Rider. That was our goal, so how can you take a motorcycle and achieve this goal? What I believe is that the hell fire that is inside of him, that explodes and changes

him, works in mysterious ways and it affects metal in certain ways: there are these studs on a leather jacket that Johnny gets later in the movie, and when he transforms, the studs start popping, the hellfire brings the chain to life; hell fire and metal work together was my theory. When he puts his hands on the tank of that motorcycle, and Ghost Rider supercharges it, fire spreads throughout the bike and it begins to mutate and turn, and it turns into a hell cycle which looks like him. It's part bone, part metal. I love the look of the hell cycle. That's the one thing that people first saw and went crazy for. They just love the look of it. It's actually going to be on the poster for the movie because people love it so much. So I'm really happy with the way it turned out.

SPOTLIGHT: So, Crash McReery was the film's concept artist and he helped develop the identity of he hell cycle?

MARK: Crash is such a great artist; he's one of the best around. When building the bike, we talked to everyone in town, they all wanted to build it. But they all wanted to build their version of it. All they cared about was that it was a real show bike, a real working bike and not so much about the art of it, the fantasy of it. Now, our bike certainly runs; it goes 90 to 100 miles an hour, it's 12 feet long...it's a beast!

SPOTLIGHT: Did you take it out for a spin? *(Laughter.)*

MARK: No! It's twelve feet long! This bike does not corner well! I did not want to dump that bike. That's the last thing I want to do! *(Laughter.)* So we just made it ourselves. I just love it. I'm so happy with the hell cycle. I love it, too, because it gave the bike a personality. This is a gothic western, and I wanted to make the movie look like something you've never seen before. I didn't want it to look like other super-hero movies, so it has a feel of a "Monster movie meets Western". And the motorcycle looks like that; it gave it a real personality, and a real sense of fun, too.

SPOTLIGHT: The evolution of this project has been a lifetime process for you, stretching back to when you were a kid, a fan of the character through the comic books. Eventually, when you became a film director you had set your sights on this, so now that it's come to fruition, how do you feel that your vision has matched up with what we're going to be seeing in February?

MARK: It's pretty close. There's always things you can't get. There always things you can't afford. Those are always the things that you think about and wish you could have had. But I'm so happy with the look of the Ghost Rider. He's so what I wanted, and in some cases, better than what I wanted, when it comes to the hell cycle and some of the stunts.

What I didn't want to do is what a lot of these movies do, which is you meet your hero or your unstoppable monster, and he goes up against the police, and they all shoot him and he stands there. It's just the same thing, you've seen it a million times. So I'm really happy with the world I set up, with the demons I set up. I wanted to give the Ghost Rider a very specific purpose so that he would be very easily understood, and that's when I came up with the idea of the bounty hunter. That was something that wasn't really in the comics. It was never quite clear to me - it was because Roxy came in and did her spell – but it always felt like the devil looked like the ultimate boob because he gave Johnny all this power and then Johnny went and fought bad guys and fought the devil. So once I came up with the idea that the Ghost Rider is the devil's bounty hunter, then everything fell into place. Throughout history there has always been a rider, and the devil will go out and find the best rider and make a deal with him. He'll find something this person wants and make a deal for his soul. And then when he needs him, when something gets out of hell, he calls upon the Ghost Rider to hunt him down and bring him back. That's really clear.

SPOTLIGHT: A simple but compelling concept.

MARK: Exactly! A really simple, really straightforward idea. Then our twist on that lore is that this time something's gotten out of hell that's never gotten out before, and that is the son of the devil. I love the story of the rebel angels and the idea that when the angels had their war and the fallen angels were cast out. The lore says that Lucifer hit the ground so hard he went to the crusts of the earth, and that's why hell is down below, which I love. That's why a lot of times in our movie, you see the devil has a broken back, he walks with a limp, with a cane. And almost all of the fallen angels followed him into hell, but some didn't. Some fell in the ocean, some fell in the desert, some fell in the sky and kept falling. And over years they've stayed hidden. So these hidden demons, the fallen angels, are the people that Blackheart is going to accumulate and say to them, "Come join me, you've been hiding for too long, you don't have to hide anymore." And these demons have taken on the element that they've been hiding in all these years, so one is from the earth, one is from the water, one is from the wind. It really ups the stakes for the fight scenes, where Ghost Rider has to find different ways of defeating each one.

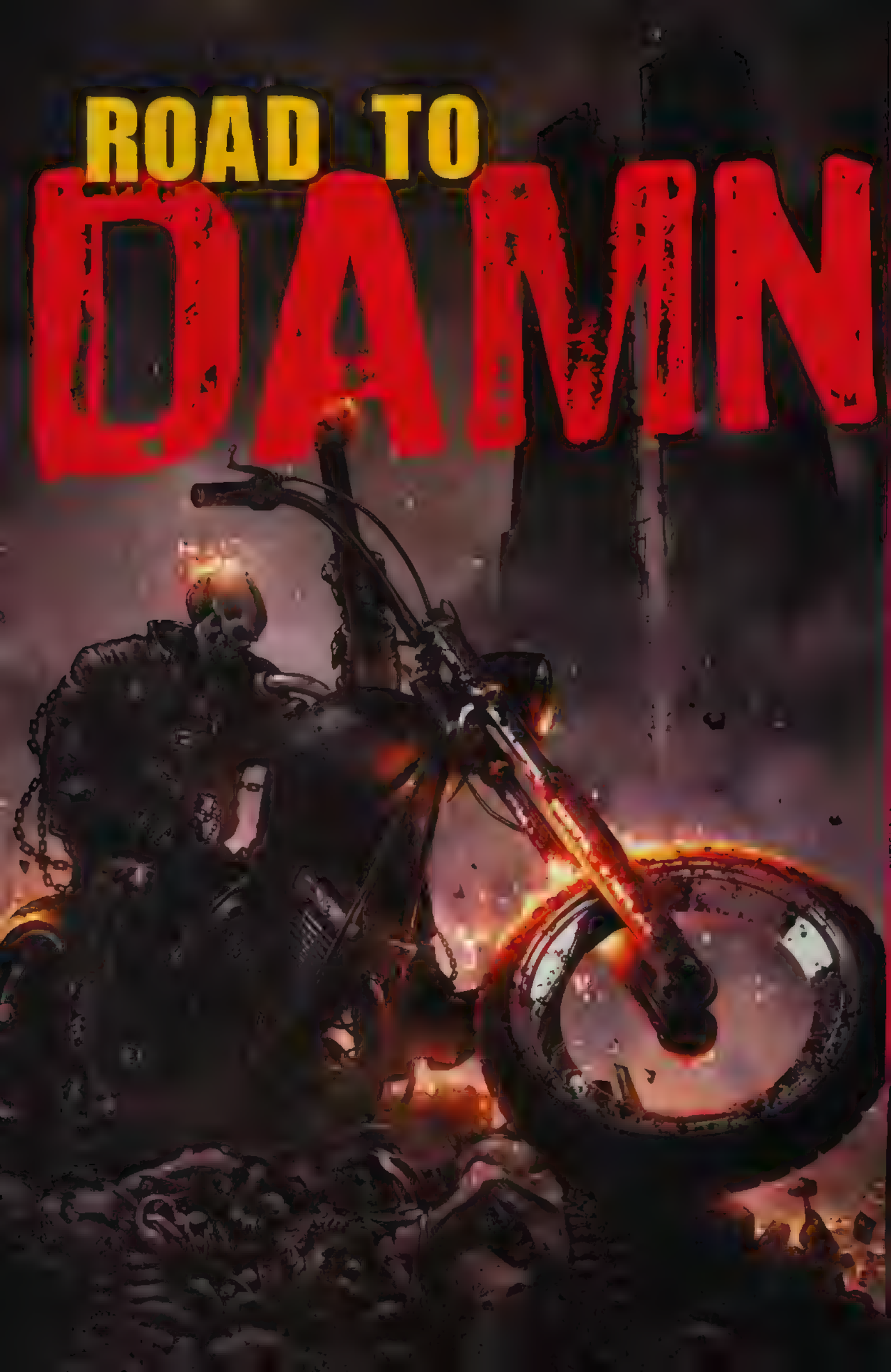
SPOTLIGHT: That sounds like a really exciting premise.

MARK: Yeah, it's fun. It's a fun mythology, and all a part of what makes Ghost Rider such an interesting subject for a movie.

Thanks to Mark for taking time out of his busy schedule to give Spotlight a really up close look at the film (loved that transformation scene!) and to talk about his life in comics and movies. See you at the theaters in February!

Mark Steven Johnson sits with film editor Richard Francis-Bruce at Sony Studios in Culver City, CA.

ROAD TO DAMN



ATION

WITH GARTH ENNIS AND CLAYTON CRAIN

BY DUGAN TRODGLEN

One of Marvel Comics' most popular characters of the early '90s, Ghost Rider fell out of favor by the end of the decade as the industry took a hit, fan tastes had changed and "burnout" occurred when it came to anti-heroes. Ghost Rider became a character that Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada decided needed to linger in limbo for a while, both to increase demand for the character and to await just the right approach for a brand new relaunch.

Who better to turn to for that fresh approach than Garth Ennis? The Irish writer had turned the Punisher, another anti-hero that had fallen victim to burnout, into a superstar character yet again with his realistic approach to violence, his dark humor, and the humanity and depth he brought to the character. When asked to do the same for Marvel's demonic biker, Ennis obliged, once again weaving his magic touch and showing why he is one of the most acclaimed comic book writers of the last decade. Joining Ennis is digital painter extraordinaire Clayton Crain, whose over-the-top style fits just right with Ennis' stunning story.

Ghost Rider: Road to Damnation, the 6-issue series by Ennis and Crain, is the perfect relaunch and re-introduction to the character and the world he inhabits. It's also, well...a roller coaster ride (okay, *motorcycle* ride; what was I thinking?!?) of a tale, complete with power-mad demons, bloodthirsty archangels, supernatural hillbilly bounty hunters, and the man who can only be called "Buttview" (ya gotta read the book, friend!) *Road to Damnation* is packed with action, with a story full of Ennis' trademark look at the nature of good vs. evil. Stripped of any excess baggage, Johnny Blaze's alter ego is given the proper lead-in to the new ongoing series by Daniel Way, Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira, but he's gonna have to go through Hell to get there!

This special section of *Marvel Spotlight: Ghost Rider* is devoted to the landmark 2006 mini-series with both creators weighing in on the character, plus an advance look at their upcoming return on *Ghost Rider: Trail of Tears*, due in 2007!

Ghost Rider, all flamed up and ready to roll, from *Road to Damnation #5*.

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH GARTH ENNIS

Few comic book writers have gained the respect in the industry that Garth Ennis enjoys. Making his mark in DC's Vertigo line on *Hellblazer* and his original creation with Steve Dillon, the acclaimed series *Preacher*, Ennis has long specialized in mature comics that take a hard look at a variety of heavy topics. He is known for some of the best dialogue in the business and his black humor is legendary. In 1999, Ennis and Dillon brought their magic to Marvel, relaunching *Punisher* and breathing new life into Marvel's most infamous vigilante. He has teamed with Clayton Crain on a pair of Ghost Rider miniseries, bringing Flamehead back to prominence. Spotlight checked in with Garth to ask about his approach to *Ghost Rider: Road to Damnation*.

SPOTLIGHT: What goes into deciding which "franchise" characters (as opposed to your original creations) you'd like to take a crack at? What first attracted to you to the Ghost Rider project?

GARTH: You try to find an angle, a way to make it interesting for yourself.

Joe Quesada actually suggested I try Ghost Rider. I've said this before, but it's hard to go wrong with a guy on a motorbike with his head on fire.

SPOTLIGHT: Ghost Rider marks the second dormant, once-popular Marvel anti-hero you have resurrected with great success (the other being the Punisher). Is breathing new life into these characters something that drew you in?

GARTH: Not really. It's more of a by-product of making them interesting enough for me to work on.

SPOTLIGHT Did the Punisher and Ghost Rider's "down time" allow you a certain freedom in redefining their characters for a new audience? How responsible did you feel to previous takes on the characters?

GARTH: Barely. Yes, I think their time out of the spotlight helped; it would have been harder to jettison most of the previous continuity with a more successful character.

SPOTLIGHT: Your series focused just about exclusively on Ghost Rider, and not his alter ego Johnny Blaze. Why did you decide to go this direction?

GARTH: Johnny Blaze didn't interest me, really. Just another tormented soul/do-gooder. Ghost Rider's not much better, but he has the huge advantage of the aforementioned motorbike and burning head.

SPOTLIGHT: How do you view Ghost Rider and his motivation? He's certainly not a superhero.

GARTH: In this story his motivation is entirely selfish; he's trying to escape from eternal damnation.

SPOTLIGHT: *Ghost Rider* takes place partly in Texas, as did your classic series Preacher. Have you ever visited Texas, or the American south? What attracts you to these areas, and what influences how you portray them?

GARTH: Yeah, a few times. I think there's something about the sheer vastness of the American desert; the endless emptiness to either side of the highway that could just swallow you up. You get the sense almost anything could happen to you out there, and no one would ever know about it afterwards. Perfect setting for stories like these.

SPOTLIGHT: You aren't shy about tackling weighty subjects like demons and angels, heaven and hell, good and evil (beyond superhero conventions), yet your work is always grounded in believable emotions and natural dialogue. How do you balance these factors?

GARTH: You try to have people speaking and behaving realistically: even demons and angels are prone to sarcasm, petty jealousy, getting fed up with their jobs. Their motivation and goals may be epic and all-encompassing, but their personal behavior can be quite recognizable and down-to-earth.

"I'M A CRUEL BUGGER WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT."

SPOTLIGHT: One of your characters in *Road to Damnation*, Miss Catmint, has the hallmarks of a classic Garth Ennis character: she sort of hides in the shadows of low self-esteem before delivering a last-act blow that forcefully alters the narrative. Why was she important to the story?

GARTH: I liked the idea of a nervous little mouse of a woman mixed up with all these monsters and killers. The least formidable by a long way, and yet she still saves the world while everyone else is tied up with their own selfish agendas.

SPOTLIGHT: Hoss is another great cast member – a good ol' boy demon who creates a sidekick who could only be called "Buttview!" What inspired Hoss, and how did you decide to make him (the hell-sent scout) the adversary-turned-ally, instead of Ruth the Archangel from heaven?

GARTH: I like writing rednecks. Hoss is a very practical, good-humored, easy-going sort of guy who doesn't care too much about the rules, just wants to get the job done. Ruth, at least until the end, is the emotionless killing machine who absolutely will not compromise. Seemed to me a reasonable guess at how agents of Hell and Heaven might behave.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of Buttview, is there any real-life person who may have served as inspiration for this character?

GARTH: Where to begin?

SPOTLIGHT: The miniseries ended quite differently than expected. I certainly thought Ghost Rider would end up back on Earth, ready for new monthly adventures in the Daniel Way-written series. What made you send him back where he started?

GARTH: I'm a cruel bugger, when you get right down to it.

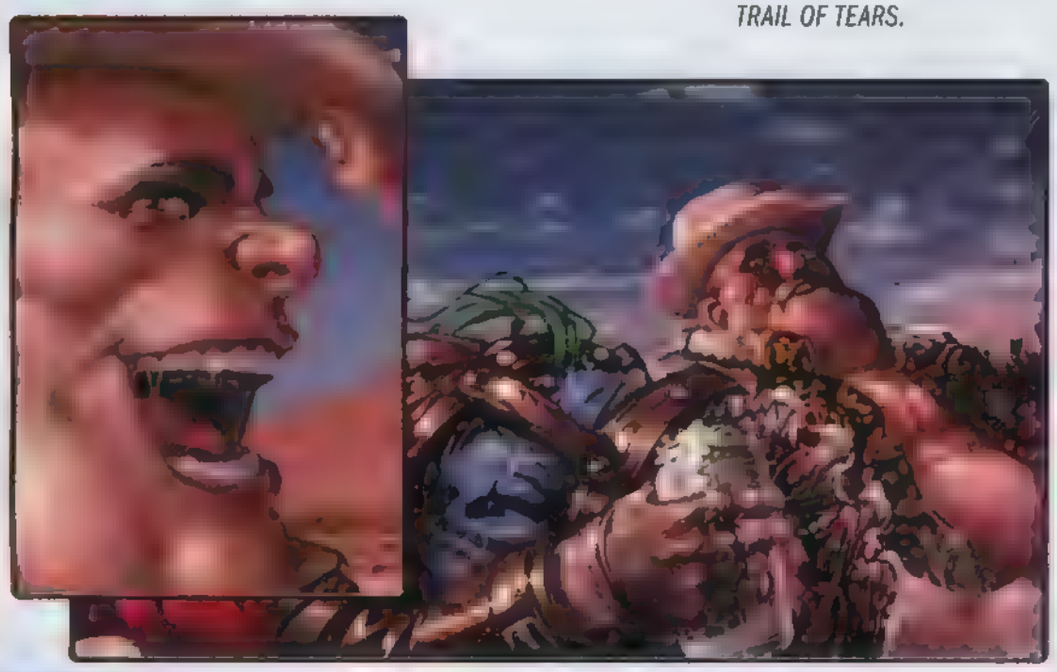
SPOTLIGHT: What's your take on what Clayton Crain brought to the project? How do you like his style?

GARTH: Clayton made it exactly what I hoped he would when I first saw his work: a vast, epic, action movie type of thing, with the whole screen filling up with fire at every opportunity. Beautiful stuff.

SPOTLIGHT: What can you tell us about your upcoming *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* miniseries with Clayton Crain? This series will focus on the old western Ghost Rider, correct?

GARTH: This is indeed a western, but features a new character that hasn't been seen before. We begin in the carnage of the Civil War and then move west, out onto the endless prairie, where all manner of horrors are being committed in the name of manifest destiny. Good deal of evil to be avenged out there.

The collected edition of the ROAD TO DAMNATION mini-series is available in both Marvel Premiere Edition Hardcover and trade paperback form. And look for a new Ghost Rider mini from the team of Ennis and Crain to start in February as they look back to a previous incarnation of the character in the western GHOST RIDER: TRAIL OF TEARS.



Johnny Blaze meets the good ol' boy demon Hoss in *Road to Damnation #3.*

CLAYTON CRAIN

Clayton Crain burst onto the scene in the 2004 miniseries *Venom vs. Carnage*. His unique digital painted style immediately stood out and when it came time to find an artist for *Ghost Rider: Road To Damnation*, his moody, dynamic work seemed like just the right fit, and indeed it was. Having already tackled the mayhem of everyone's favorite evil symbiote in his debut miniseries, Crain jumped at the chance to bring to life Ghost Rider and his demonic milieu. *Spotlight* talked to Clayton about how he went about creating the incredible visuals of *Ghost Rider: Road To Damnation*.

SPOTLIGHT: You handle all aspects of the art in your books, all the way to the coloring. How did you develop this style, especially the almost 3-D depth your work seems to have?

CLAYTON: When I first started taking up working in full color, I used photo reference. For practice I would set a photo next to a blank canvas (photoshop) and try to get it as close to the original as I could. That more than anything made drawing on a tablet second nature. When I was given the project, I built Ghost Rider's motorcycle in Lightwave 8D.

SPOTLIGHT: It looks like an intense process! How long does it take you to do a 22-page story?

CLAYTON: When I started in '03, it took about 14-16 hours a page. That's about two and a half months. After three years, I'm at about 8-11 hours per page. Actually, *Sensational Spider-Man #28* I finished in about five weeks. My goal is a monthly book or biweekly. I could not master simultaneously drawing with my left hand.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you hook up with Marvel, and *Ghost Rider* specifically?

CLAYTON: After about two months of practicing Computer Illustrating, I sent out a submission of a Spider-Man illustration to Axel Alonso. He showed interest in my work, so every week I'd send another image. After *Venom vs. Carnage*, I was given a choice of doing *Captain America* or *Ghost Rider*. I was more familiar with *Ghost Rider*. Also, my people were looking a bit stiff and lifeless, so it was the best way to go.

SPOTLIGHT: Have you ever been into motorcycles? Or did you have to do a lot of research to get the design down?

CLAYTON: [illegible] young, I may [illegible] was my crutch.

SPOTLIGHT: [illegible]

CLAYTON: [illegible] Ghost Rider [illegible] myself what would this [illegible] feet at night. I didn't [illegible] really shouldn't have even given him brakes — brakes [illegible]

SPOTLIGHT: Your Kazann the Dem[illegible]ive. How much guidance did Garth Ennis give you for [illegible] character design? How much of the design came from your imagin[illegible] and what influenced it?

CLAYTON: [illegible] body parts, vertebra for [illegible] bony remains, and a few [illegible] probably missed. I decipher his description into a visual then add in my magic ingredient of not being able to read so well, then, "Zing!". We have a monster.

SPOTLIGHT: In general, how specific was Ennis about the book's visuals?

CLAYTON: He breaks it down as far as close-up, mid-shot, and long-shot. He's detailed in his character description. But I add in my magic ingredient then, "Zing!"

SPOTLIGHT: Buttview's name pretty much dictates his look, but it seems like he would be nonetheless difficult to articulate. How much work was he?

CLAYTON: He was short so he didn't get much face time.

SPOTLIGHT: What was your reaction when you "discovered" him in Garth's script?

CLAYTON: "That's messed up!"

Ghost Rider meets the angel Malachi in this gorgeous splash page by Clayton Crain. (From *Road To Damnation* #2.)

Trial of Tears #3, page 10 (unlettered)

THE

GHOST RIDE

It's been almost eight years since Ghost Rider held down his own monthly title, but *Road to Damnation* perked up flameheads across comicdom with a scintillating new mini-series and interest in the movie starring Nicolas Cage sealed the deal. A new ongoing title is a no-brainer at a time when public recognition of one of Marvel's coolest characters will be at an all-time high. Of course, one of the major questions is...which Ghost Rider? He's been through a lot over the years, and any creator who came on board would have one mighty tangled web to weave through.

The easiest choice — and best choice — for handling the art chores was to find the two guys who made the '90s Danny Ketch version a smash hit: Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira! These two guys are more than just comic art veterans; they're Ghost Rider fans of the highest caliber, and their love of the character shines through as they turn in the work of their careers in this new GR revival. Coming on board to do a two-issue intermission in *Ghost Rider #6-7* is none other than Richard Corben, the legendary artist known for his far out fantasy. If anyone can draw Ghost Rider riding like a bat out of hell, it's Corben!

As for writing talent, Marvel is fortunate to have in their stable of writers a new guy on the block with the gusto of Garth Ennis and the wild streak of Johnny Blaze. In the wildst of his massively successful new *Wolverine: Origins* series, Daniel Way has come on board to pull a similar trick on the legend of the Ghost Rider, but it won't be easy! Just like his *Origins* gig, Daniel Way has busted out the *Official Handbooks*, read through all the old comics, and hit up the longtime creative veterans for his homework assignment, and it's paying off with this visceral and vital new take on Johnny Blaze...yes, Johnny Blaze! As the new series is about to hit its fifth issue, *Spotlight* had occasion to check in with the writing side of *Ghost Rider's* creative team, Daniel Way.

GHOST RIDER #8: Cover by the inimitable Arthur Suydam.

ER RETURNS: THE NEW SERIES

SPOTLIGHT: *Ghost Rider* is your first ongoing title since you started *Wolverine: Origins*, and last time we talked with you, getting *Origins* launched was such a huge deal, what with all the homework you had to get done to put the pitch together. But looking at Ghost Rider, that character has as complicated a backstory as Wolverine!

DANIEL: It's actually more complicated. Wolverine has built-in memory implants, so if there are ever any two pieces of continuity that cannot exist simultaneously, just say one was a memory implant and the other was...a memory implant! *(Laughter.)* With Ghost Rider, it all comes down to what happened in the '90s. I'm not sure why they decided to complicate matters, because when they started that series, the Danny Ketch Ghost Rider had maybe the simplest origin in the history of comics, other than "alien lands on Earth." Danny Ketch was in a graveyard, his sister was getting roughed up, he saw a motorcycle, touched it – boom! He became Ghost Rider. That was his origin. And the book was a smash hit. And all he did was ride around Brooklyn and beat up street-level characters, and then it became something else, and that went over like a lead balloon.

So the biggest stumbling block has always been in the latter phase of the character, which is why we went back to Johnny Blaze, because it was just a more streamlined character. He's cooler, because he's so dumb and dangerous, and he does things that are stupid and irresponsible. He's a stunt guy, and it's not like he is taking care of his mom or anything for a motivation, he's just a dude. The Dude-Man! *(Laughter.)* He has almost godlike powers, but he's just too stupid to use them.

SPOTLIGHT: That goes back to his early days in the comic, where it took him a while to master how he could use his powers, and wound up getting in over his head a bunch of times.

DANIEL: Yeah, and at the same time there were people popping out of the woodwork who would say, "You're the Ghost Rider, I know all about you!" But you know, all these people knew who he was, but he didn't. "What do you know about me?" He's running into snake women, the devil, all these minor demons, these weird Indian godlike things...he just has no concept of what is going on, because he just wants to get back to where he could make that next stunt show at the Iowa State Fair. And that was cool! And that's what I wanted to stick with on this book; I wanna have him out there, kicking butt and having things slowly become real to him.

SPOTLIGHT: That first issue definitely kicked butt. You started with a bang with him bursting out of Hell.

DANIEL: Yeah, it was a jailbreak. I've said this before, what Garth Ennis and Clayton Crain did was very successful and people really liked it, so it would have been stupid not to incorporate that.

SPOTLIGHT: That was your jumping off point, what they had done in *Road to Damnation*?

DANIEL: Right, and so what we had to do to give it some legs was get him out of Hell...and that's your first issue. You know, you worry about first issues, wondering how you're going to bring readers in. I thought, "Well, let's just give them this extended James Bond opening scene, where we have our hero escape from Hell, and he gets screwed again, and he comes to Earth and he brings the devil with him."

SPOTLIGHT: What's great about that first issue, too, is that it's a very reader friendly, self-contained story.

DANIEL: And there are several themes introduced in that first issue that will be reoccurring, that we'll see again and again. The fact that Johnny Blaze is a sucker for a good line, the idea that perception is everything, that Ghost Rider is basically limited by Johnny Blaze's imagination, and lack thereof. He thought he was trapped in hell because he's convinced he can never escape. There's even a character in there that says, point blank, "Isn't it funny that Hell looks exactly like you thought it would?" Now, that character turns out to be the devil himself, but he's tipping his hand to Johnny. He's saying, "You really *are* stupid!"

And then the first issue also sets up a big conflict, that it's become this kind of cartoony thing between Heaven and Hell, and that Satan is the ruler of hell, as if he's happy there. But he's stuck there very much against his will – at least that's what I've read in the Big Book, right? He didn't want to be there, so why would he want to stay there?

SPOTLIGHT: You mention how you like to have as part of Johnny's persona an element of him playing the sucker. The great way that *Ghost Rider #1* finishes is that he does something really stupid, perhaps even more stupid than what he did in his origin story [in *Marvel Spotlight #5*], and it sets up the overarching premise of your big storyline: now he's trying to pull all the terrible powers he has unleashed back in. He's got a big job ahead of him, the way you've got it all set up.

DANIEL: That goes back to that very first *Ghost Rider* issue. He finds out about a problem [step-dad Crash Simpson having cancer] and in one panel, he has gone and whipped out this satanic bible and

"[JOHNNY BLAZE] FINDS OUT ABOUT A PROBLEM IN ONE PANEL, HE HAS GONE AND WHIPPED OUT WITH THE DEVIL. THAT'S NOT A SMART

he's now communicating with the devil. That's not a smart move. How about calling a doctor? You know what I mean? *(Laughter.)* How about doing a fundraiser, some sort of stunt show for cancer research? Don't just jump the gun by skipping straight to the nether beings. That's a bad idea and it's not gonna end well. Has it ever ended well for anybody? *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: No, it sure hasn't. But it has given us 35 years of great comic books! Off an on, that is. *(Laughter.)* Now, you've got a couple great compatriots in your series here in Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira. The stories are a lot of fun, but the art is really, really great.

DANIEL: I couldn't agree more. Those guys are just blowing it out. To be absolutely honest, I feel that I've kinda dropped the ball by not allowing those guys to stretch out more. That became painfully obvious to me when I read some of Jeph Loeb's scripts yesterday, to catch up on interaction between his *Wolverine* book and my *Origin* book for something that we're setting up there, and I'm reading through Jeph's scripts, and how he stages for those huge moments, and I'm like, "Why don't I do this? Why don't I just lose those guys and keep the story smaller and tighter, and just let the characters and art go big?"

SPOTLIGHT: So is that something you have in mind as this series goes on?

DANIEL: Yeah, it's something I wish I had done more, and it's something that I'm definitely going to do. I've always had a great time writing the *Ghost Rider* stories, but now I'm gonna let those guys get in on the fun, too.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, that knockdown, dragout with Doctor Strange in *Ghost Rider #3* was a lot of fun, for both you and the artists. I mean, one thing that's so cool about this new series is that it's such a dark book in its tone, and you've intervened it with a sense of humor in your same of the most related plot points, you're throwing at readers.

DANIEL: Well, I get to write the devil. And that's fun. And this devil, he loves pushing Johnny Blaze's buttons. It's his favorite toy and he never gets tired of playing with it. And as we find out in the book, it's all part of Lucifer's plan. He wants to get Ghost Rider mixed up in the mayhem

SUPER-HERO SHOWDOWN: It's Hell on Wheels vs. Master of the Mystic Arts in *Ghost Rider #3!*

[STEP-DAD CRASH SIMPSON HAVING CANCER] AND THIS SATANIC BIBLE AND HE'S NOW COMMUNICATING MOVE. HOW ABOUT CALLING A DOCTOR?"

[illegible] keep him on edge, because he has something that he needs Ghost Rider to do. He wants Ghost Rider to chase him down, because it's all part of his plan for consolidating power. And even though Johnny knows exactly what the score is, he's going to play ball, because he's Johnny Blaze, and he has you eye of him. "Johnny! You can't keep doing this!" Johnny says, "This can't keep going, Johnny! You don't defeat the devil!" Johnny says, "But I can't disappoint my daughter!" It's always your [illegible]

SPOTLIGHT: How do you make a character like Johnny Blaze a guy that you root for and at the same time keep him in his sometimes dopey, impulsive persona, constantly making the wrong choices just keep him moving?

DANIEL: People identify with him. [illegible] the right call, especially in a situation like this. Nobody can say what they'd do [illegible] a decision like this. He's got [illegible] and legal for [illegible] continuity [illegible] doesn't [illegible] is a guy [illegible] kind of [illegible] his [illegible]

SPOTLIGHT: [illegible] but [illegible] this [illegible] Satan's power even more.

DANIEL: And one is more powerful than the next.

SPOTLIGHT: It's pretty exhilarating as a fan to read this and know what [illegible]

DANIEL: [illegible] it's gotta be 666!

Now, I ran into a little flawed logic, as someone pointed out to me: Why doesn't Ghost Rider just drag them all separately to Hell, power and all? I thought, gosh that's a good question. But the same kind of reasoning that I used to fracture Lucifer as he came across the mortal plane would also apply the other way. If Ghost Rider is in Hell, who is holding the line here on Earth? He's got his light here and he's not gonna leave it. So I think it all worked out.

SPOTLIGHT: As a Ghost Rider fan, it's one of those great comic moments, the kind you can only really get in comics.

DANIEL: It was cool when I was talking to Tex [artist Mark Texeira] on the phone. Tex is a [illegible] guy as it is, but he [illegible] down. He's already just spitting out ideas on what we should do, and I'm like, "Tex, slow down. I need to get some of [illegible] something I'm serious about, because I've only been [illegible] for about five or six years, and when you've got an [illegible] spouting [illegible] mouth, write it down. If anybody knows how to make a Ghost Rider book look good, it's Mark Texeira — and Javier as well.

[illegible] Chicago at a convention and I sat down with Javier and we had a couple of beers, and I asked him, "Walk me through how [illegible] Ghost Rider book." He said, "In the beginning [illegible] nobody expected anything, and we were given [illegible] that I blew up and it needed a lot of details for it."

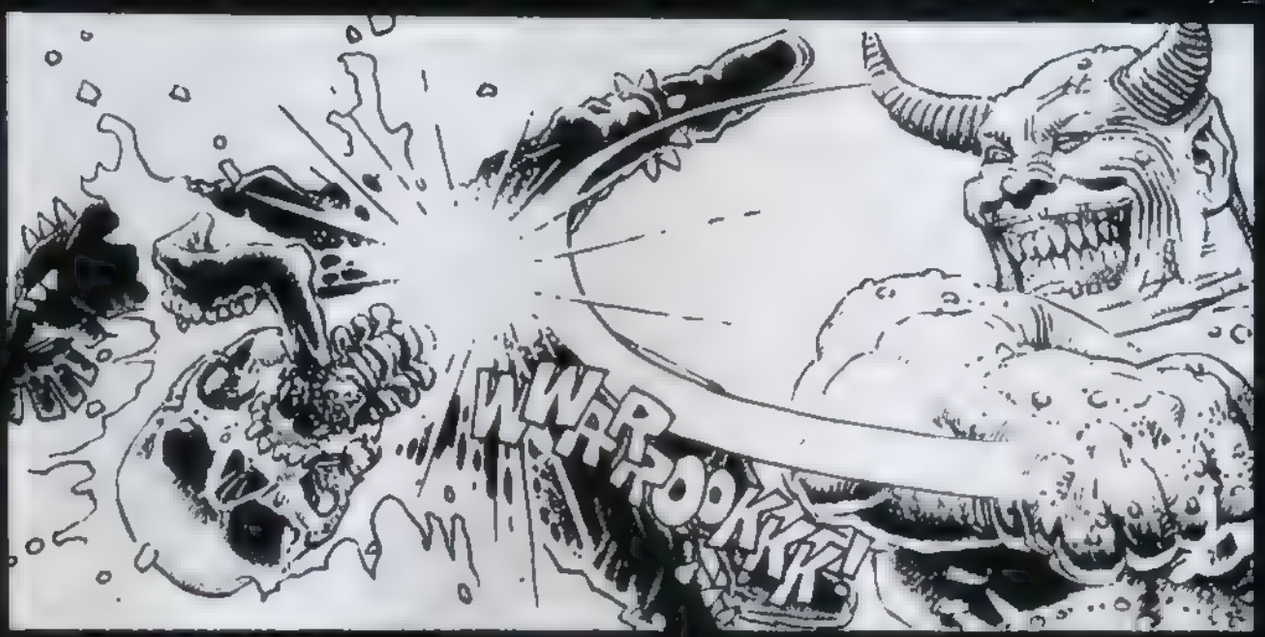
[illegible] to redesign the bike, and evidently Howard Mackie wanted [illegible] to [illegible] around a shotgun, and Javier says, "How about [illegible] good a call was that? That Ghost Rider was [illegible] ended up with an amalgamation of the bike [illegible] like, and it's obviously borrowing usually from the [illegible] Rider, [illegible] everything. It's comic books, so we get a lot of latitude.

[illegible] with Spotlight once again, Daniel. And to sum [illegible] big [illegible] WOLVERINE: ORIGINS, [illegible] pages of the upcoming [illegible] commentary by Daniel

RICHARD CORBEN GALLERY:
Black and white art from *Ghost Rider #6*.

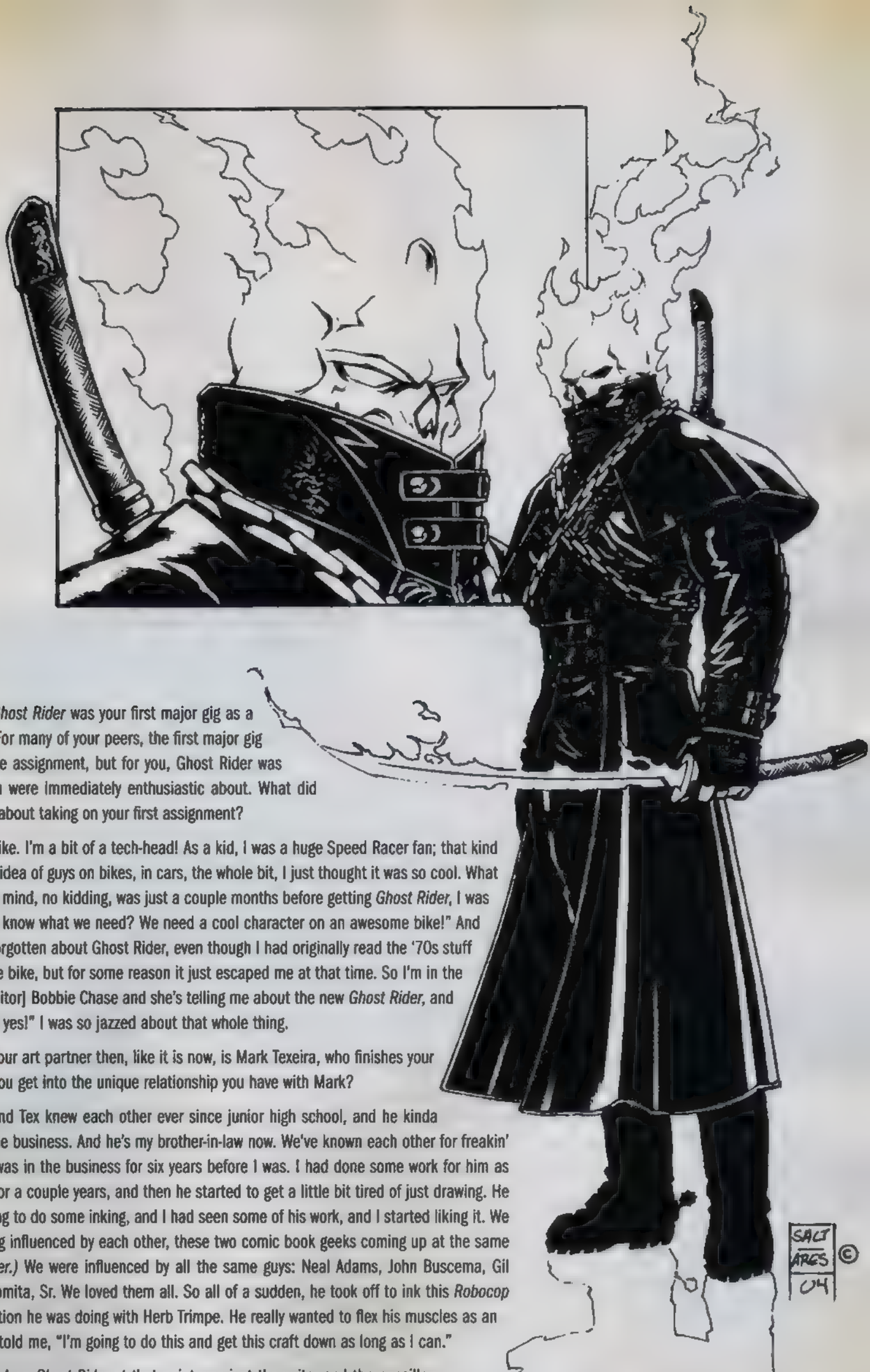
"We've got Richard Corben doing two issues, and I finally got to look at all the pages today — they got FedExed over today, and it's all inked and lettered — and this thing is just so tight right now, we're not even going to do any revisions. We're just moving balloons around. Corben's stuff just looks so greasy and lurid, it's such a cool fit." —Daniel Way

"This is the story about how Johnny Blaze ended up trapped in Hell, and how Ghost Rider ended up trapped in Hell along with Johnny. You know, nobody looks like Corben. You see those big heads, and everybody looks like those marionettes, a grotesquerie. I don't own many comic books but I have a copy of his book from 1970, Rowlf. The dude was making comics back around Woodstock. It's pretty cool to be doing comics with him." –Daniel



THE ART OF GHOST RIDER: JAVIER SALTARES

Javier Saltares' career as a comic artist started in the mid-'80s, when there was no *Ghost Rider* to be found on the new comics sales racks. But after six years of dormancy, it was time to dust off the character for a new generation of readership, and it was Javier who enthusiastically took the job! Nobody knew at the time the smash hit that the comic would become, and Javier and art partner Mark Texeira's take on the character would solidify in many people's minds the definitive look of the Ghost Rider – a more aggressive posture, a meaner, tougher look and a wicked hell cycle of a bike! It was Javier's designs that helped bring Ghost Rider back into popularity in such a big way, and since he's returned to the title on multiple stints, including today's stirring new take, *Spotlight* went to him to share with readers his Ghost Rider fandom.



SPOTLIGHT: *Ghost Rider* was your first major gig as a comic artist. For many of your peers, the first major gig is not a choice assignment, but for you, Ghost Rider was something you were immediately enthusiastic about. What did you like most about taking on your first assignment?

JAVIER: The bike. I'm a bit of a tech-head! As a kid, I was a huge Speed Racer fan; that kind of thing – the idea of guys on bikes, in cars, the whole bit, I just thought it was so cool. What really blew my mind, no kidding, was just a couple months before getting *Ghost Rider*, I was thinking, "You know what we need? We need a cool character on an awesome bike!" And I had totally forgotten about Ghost Rider, even though I had originally read the '70s stuff because of the bike, but for some reason it just escaped me at that time. So I'm in the office with [editor] Bobbie Chase and she's telling me about the new *Ghost Rider*, and I'm like, "Hell, yes!" I was so jazzed about that whole thing.

SPOTLIGHT: Your art partner then, like it is now, is Mark Texeira, who finishes your pencils. Can you get into the unique relationship you have with Mark?

JAVIER: Me and Tex knew each other ever since junior high school, and he kinda got me into the business. And he's my brother-in-law now. We've known each other for freakin' ever, and he was in the business for six years before I was. I had done some work for him as an assistant for a couple years, and then he started to get a little bit tired of just drawing. He started wanting to do some inking, and I had seen some of his work, and I started liking it. We started getting influenced by each other, these two comic book geeks coming up at the same time. *(Laughter.)* We were influenced by all the same guys: Neal Adams, John Buscema, Gil Kane, John Romita, Sr. We loved them all. So all of a sudden, he took off to ink this *Robocop* movie adaptation he was doing with Herb Trimpe. He really wanted to flex his muscles as an inker, and he told me, "I'm going to do this and get this craft down as long as I can."

So all they had on *Ghost Rider* at that point was just the writer and the penciller: Howard and me. I asked Bobbie, "Who's inking this?" And she said, "We're still trying to figure that out!" So I suggested that Mark wanted to ink, and I just happened to have a couple of pages in my hand, and said, "Look at this. He wants to ink. Why don't you let him do this?" Sure enough, that was it. That was his first ongoing gig as an inker.

PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED CHARACTER DESIGN: "This was done a couple of years ago, oddly enough. It was my take on a more in-control, badass looking GR," says Javier.

SPOTLIGHT: And your first ongoing gig as a penciller! And you guys did *Ghost Rider* did the first year of the revival.

JAVIER: I was just trying to get my feet wet back then, but I only skipped a couple issues from that first year. Mark ended up doing all of issue 7 and Larry Stroman did all of issue 11. Then I got off the book, Mark took it over, and then that was it for a while, and then the crash happened, and everybody was bottoming out. I was caught up in all that, too, but they called me back and we ended up doing those last few issues, but by then, everything really tanked out, and that was the end of that for a while.

SPOTLIGHT: Now, they're finally publishing the legendary lost issue of *Ghost Rider #94* in the Ghost Rider Finale, and you helped pull all that together. From what I understand you're the savior of this whole project, because you had that art still sitting around!

JAVIER: Are you kidding me? *(Laughter.)* You wanna know what's so funny? It wasn't until I started working on the new Ghost Rider series that they dug it up and actually found this thing, and they just sent it back to me about a year ago, when I stared working with [GR editor] Axel Alonso on *Wolverine*. I got a call and they asked, "Do you have anything from *Ghost Rider #94*?" And I said, "Oddly enough, I have everything!" I had everything that I had done on the book – they had divvied it up between me and Tex – so I just sent it all back to them. At the time, they said they were thinking about doing it, but they weren't sure, so I had no idea what was going to happen.

SPOTLIGHT: Were you disappointed when Ghost Rider crashed with issue #93, right out from under you?

JAVIER: Yeah, for two reasons. For one thing, and this may sound corny, but I genuinely love the character, and on a professional level, too, he's kinda like my claim to fame. But the other thing was because I just needed the work, and I didn't want to lose that work; that was a very disheartening thing. For those two reasons, it was definitely a bummer.

SPOTLIGHT: So are you looking forward to *Ghost Rider* Finale finally coming out?

JAVIER: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed working with [*GR #93-94* writer] Ivan Velez, and I remember he also went through a lot with all that going on, too, but you just look back and say it's the nature of the beast.

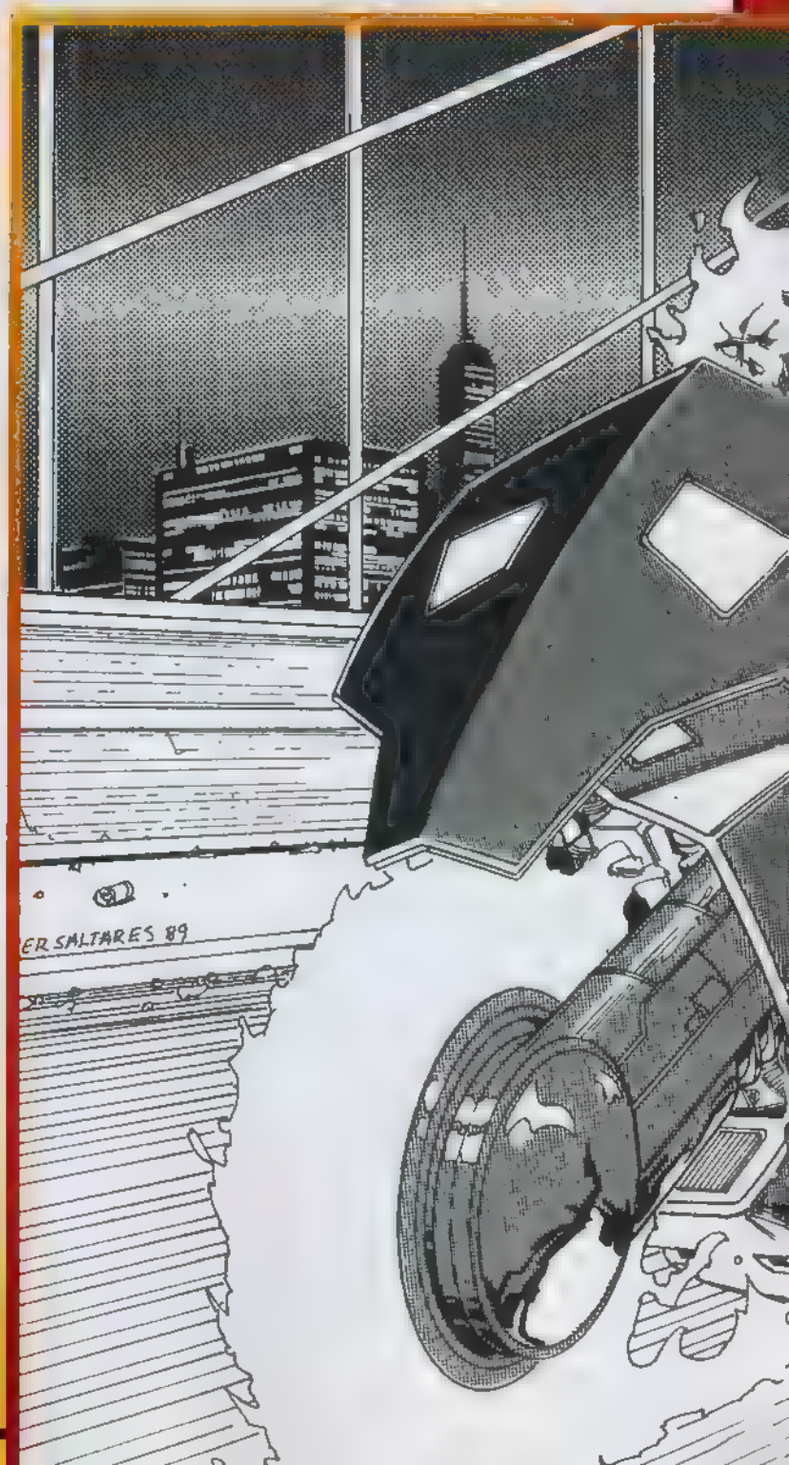
SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of the nature of the beast, the new *GR* series you're working on with Mark and writer Daniel Way, you guys have him stuck in Hell in the first issue and all miserable, but you guys look like you're having a ball! What's it like for you to jumpstart a new *Ghost Rider* series again in a new decade?

JAVIER: You know what? No lie, it is so cool! I picked it up like they only took the script away from me yesterday. It was like a no-brainer, I just immediately went back into the zone. As soon as I got the script, I said, "I know exactly what I'm going to do here, and I know exactly what I'm going to do there." And now, I feel like I'm on top of my game. I feel like I've been handing stuff in on time, and now I've actually been given an opportunity to enjoy the ride. I have fun doing it, but at the same time, I finally have it down where I can sit back and enjoy my life, which only makes me enjoy the work all the more. Sitting down to work is like play time.

And Daniel is doing a hell of a job, no pun intended. (*Laughter.*) That guy, when we first started on this, he was just freaking out. I know he must feel a lot more relaxed about it now, because he's not calling anymore, but I was telling him when we first started, "You've got to breathe! You got to relax! They hired you, it's a good thing!" (*Laughter.*) But his scripts just get better and better. *Ghost Rider #9*, what I'm working on right now, it's just what comics are all about. It's all fun, punch, kick, pow action, and I feel like I'm nine years old drawing it.

SPOTLIGHT: I love that one panel you've got in *Ghost Rider #1*, where you've got GR dragging that demon by the chain; it's just fun and absurd comic action, but at the same time there's an undercurrent of violent energy that is palatable. Are there any art techniques that you are incorporating with this new series that are maybe different than your previous take on *GR*?

JAVIER: Yeah, actually I am. I'd never worked with Axel before the Wolverine stuff [*Wolverine #36-40*]. It's almost like he was priming me with the Wolverine stuff before I did this. He told me, "You know, I'm looking at this stuff and I'm seeing what you're doing and your strength is you're a really strong storyteller. But you're a so-so designer." So of course, it's a backhanded compliment. He says to me, "Don't worry about anything else. Do the traditional grid and just worry about the storytelling." Bottom line is, he was right, when I started worrying about



the storytelling, all of a sudden, everything started falling into place. And even the design started to emerge all by itself. But funny enough, I don't think that would have gone over with very many books, like an X-book. But with *Ghost Rider*, it's like with EC Comics. They were very old school, very traditional and they worked. And because *Ghost Rider* has that same horror feel, it works, too.

Then I got a really nice compliment from Axel because he wanted me to help some other guy out with his storytelling. So at this point, he feels like my stuff is getting so strong, he wanted me to help this guy out with layouts! So that was kinda neat.

But if I had to say if there was any big difference, you look back in the '80s, where the design thing between Jim Lee, Todd MacFarlane and all those guys became a really big issue and where everybody was trying to mimic that pinup style....and now here's Axel telling me, "Naw, forget all that. Pull back and just worry about telling the story." And I think that really works.

SPOTLIGHT: Give me your temperature reading on your future with Ghost Rider. Are you on the book until they fire ya?

JAVIER: Yep! I told Axel that. I really do want to stay with this. Like I told you, when I came back on this book, it was like I left it only yesterday. *Ghost Rider* is the easiest thing for me to do and that's always a good thing for a commercial artist. It's like breathing. You give me a script and I can start handing in the art. Believe me, there are a lot of characters I'd love do to – like Iron Man, Captain America, Spider-Man, those guys I grew up with. But with *Ghost Rider*, what is so funny is I remember when I first did him back in '89, I remember thinking, "Oh man, this is going to go over like a lead balloon. This is an odd character!" But I just had fun with it: It's a guy on a bike! Just make it as visual as possible and have a blast with it!

Javier is one of the nicest guys in comics, so it was a real pleasure to catch up with him, and Spotlight hopes you flameheads really enjoyed it. Be sure to keep up with his work picking up with Ghost Rider #8!"

BEHIND THE BOARDS: Javier Saltares makes the action happen in the all-new monthly *Ghost Rider*.

"This was the first finished piece for the original series. All I had done up to then was some character sheet designs and some bike designs, and once that was approved and we started working on the book itself, I just got a wild hair and I had that image in my head of him going across the Brooklyn Bridge, so I sat down and drew it. And after I finished drawing it, I thought, 'Well, I'll just go ahead and ink this!'"
–Javier on his B&W pencils and inks of Ghost Rider crossing the Brooklyn Bridge.

GHOST RIDER 8 20

"Woohoo! Monsters! That was the feeling I got doing this piece...just fun, big, scary stuff!"
–Javier on this piece of original art from *Ghost Rider #8*, 1990.

ART PAPER FOR BLEED PAGES (BOOKSHELF FORMAT OR SADDLE STITCH) PRINTS AT 67% ILLUSTRATION QUALITY

ALL BLEED ART MUST EXTEND TO SOLID LINE

KEEP ALL LETTERING INSIDE BROKEN-LINE BOX

Book GHOST RIDER Issue 94 Story Page # 22 Line Up Page #

MIKE PLOOG: MARVEL

The concept of Ghost Rider the biker from hell originated with writer Gary Friedrich and editor Roy Thomas, but the visual look of the character came from the imaginative mind of Mike Ploog, one of comic history's most beloved artists. Fresh from a ten-year stint in the US Marine Corps, Mike landed a job with Will Eisner, one of comics' all time masters, taking over the publication of P*S Magazine, a periodical aimed at military readers. Shortly thereafter, Mike landed at Marvel at just the right time to take a creative lead on the development of Marvel's early-'70s horror comics, and he was ready to deliver! Mike joined *Marvel Spotlight* to look back fondly at his brief but powerful time as Marvel's top monster artist, providing visual art to the macabre tales of Man-Thing, Werewolf By Night, Frankenstein...and Ghost Rider!

MASTER OF HORROR

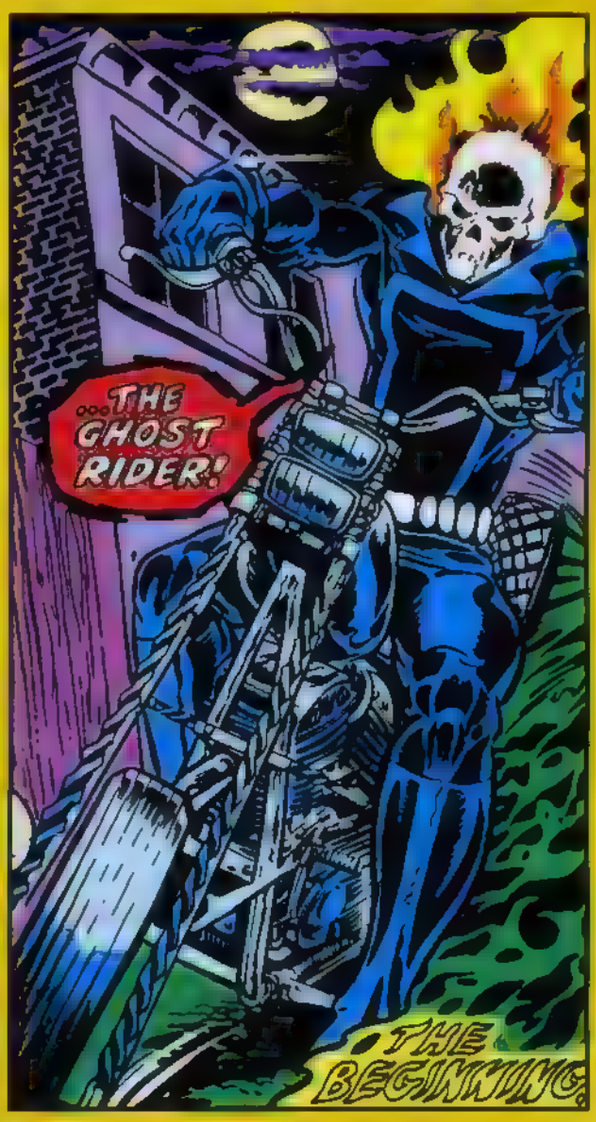
SPOTLIGHT: Your first illustrated art for mass publication was in the early '70s with Warren Publications, in *Eerie* and *Creepy*, but almost simultaneous with that you started working with Marvel Comics in their rapidly growing horror initiative. It sounds like you hit the ground running with Marvel, so how did you evolve your style so that you could be so good so quickly?

MIKE: That's a very difficult question. I was a big Milton Caniff fan. I loved his approach to light and dark, and I also was a big fan of old horror movies, so with the combination of the two things, I just melted into it. I worked really hard to try to get away from Will Eisner's style and to get into my own thing, but I wasn't really trying to "have a style." I was just trying to learn how to draw, period! *(Laughter.)* To hell with having a style, just get a drawing down there that somebody recognizes!

SPOTLIGHT: You may not have been at Marvel for a long time, and you may not have been as prolific as some of your peers, but the synchronicity of your arrival there with Marvel's aggressive foray into horror comics produced some extremely memorable comics.

MIKE: I was really enjoying doing *Frankenstein*, and they decided that they wanted to update him, take him out of the Victorian period, and all of a sudden I lost interest in the character, because I couldn't see Frankenstein teaming up with Spider-Man. *(Laughter.)* It was all about team-ups at that time, that's what they were looking for. So after that, Gary Friedrich and Roy Thomas had had this *Ghost Rider* idea for quite a while, playing around with it, and they said, "Well, let's get Ploog doing something." That's when they called me up.

They were like, "Would you like to do a thing called *Ghost Rider*?" And for some goofy reason, whether it was because the conversation was strange or because I misinterpreted it, I thought it was a western! As I was putzing around with the design, suddenly they were talking about him riding a motorcycle, and I was



"Gary Friedrich and Roy Thomas had had this Ghost Rider idea for quite a while, playing around with it, and they said, 'Well, let's get Ploog doing something.' That's when they called me up."

like, "Whoah, whoah, whoah...wait a minute!" *(Laughter.)* So I had to change tack before I turned anything in...thank God! I would have been embarrassed sending in this cowboy character, and they were looking forward to a guy with a flaming skull. *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: As an artist, did you sync up with the Ghost Rider character design pretty quickly?

MIKE: Yes, it was a fairly simply concept. They just wanted a night rider that dressed in black with a flaming skull. So I just sat down, and it was a fairly straightforward design. For the costume itself, I put the white piping on it so that I could do the blacks and keep them black and dark, but yet always maintain a figure in everything I drew. I'd have the piping go down the arm and across the chest.

SPOTLIGHT: What are yourmain impressions about your time drawing Ghost Rider? It was very short – only four issues [in *Marvel Spotlight #5-8*] – but very influential on the makeup and style of the character going forward.

MIKE: It was a very dark story, and so you had to have a lot of atmospherics in it. I needed to put as much atmosphere in it as I had time to put in, because in those days, it was like, "Get the book in. Don't care what it looks like, you have to get it in on time."

SPOTLIGHT: There was a lot of occult influence on the book. Did that ever make you sit up at night, worrying that you were perhaps unlocking some ancient ritual through your drawings? *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: Not really, because I dug up as much reference as I possibly could about the occult, and stuff like that never bothered me. But there was one time I got a letter – I got some very strange letters during that period of time – but I got a letter from a witches' coven, from some place in Iowa or the Midwest, and they invited me to come to this witches' coven! I just breezed over the letter and I thought, "Whoah! Talk about some nutcases. They've got to be joking!" I thought it was a joke. Well, the months went by and then I get another letter, but this letter is a very strange letter; it's written on this goofy paper, and in some kind of sepia colored ink, I guess to make you think that it was written in blood...but they were *really* pissed off that I didn't show up! It was true! I had been invited to a witches' coven. And I'll tell ya, it's the God's honest truth, I had sliding glass doors in my bedroom at the time, and the wind would rattle the doors and I slept with the lights on for months...I'm not kidding you! *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: I'm glad that you made it out of that alive! Shortly after you got out of comics, you got more heavily involved in animation, working with Ralph Bakshi (*Heavy Metal*). Along with that, you've been storyboarding for films. So you're in a unique position here where you've left comics and you're into film, and now you sort of get to sit back and watch someone else do that for a movie that you did as a comic.

MIKE: I've seen the trailer that's on the internet, and that's about it. It's going to be very interesting to see what they've done with it. I tell ya, I figured going in that they were going to have a hell of a time writing a script, because it's a difficult character, and it's very dark, and unless they turn it into something that dark, there's not going to be much of a story. There's not a lot of room for comic relief there, so I'm interested to see what they're going to come up with.

SPOTLIGHT: What do you think about the relationship between the values of comic storytelling and film storyboarding? For you, is it a pretty seamless transition when from one to the other?

MIKE: For me it was, because I was always a big movie buff. Before I went into the military, I worked at a stable that rented horses to movie sets, so I spent a lot of time on television sets, on movie sets. Movies were something that I was always interested in; I was fascinated by the medium, and how you could create those illusions, put them on film and make people believe them. Comics are much the same: you create an illusion and hopefully it's believable enough to where your reader is going to buy it. I was just lucky, I guess, that my imagination took me into these crazy little worlds.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, based on your work on things like *Ghost Rider, Monster of Frankenstein* and *Werewolf By Night*, you still have a huge legion of fans that love your work. What are you working on these days?

MIKE: Right now, I'm working on a series with JM DeMatteis called Abadazad, a young reader's book, which I really enjoy doing. I enjoy doing that so much; I always thought that was the thing I wanted to get into more than anything else. I'm also doing a werewolf story right now for an English company, so I'm still doing werewolves. You can't get rid of them! Once you've got a werewolf, that's it! You're stuck with it for life!!!

The Mike Ploog drawn issues featuring Ghost Rider can be found in ESSENTIAL GHOST RIDER VOL. 1. Also look for Mike's work in ESSENTIAL FRANKENSTEIN and ESSENTIAL WEREWOLF BY NIGHT VOL. 1!

KICKSTARTING THE GHOST RIDER:

ROY THOMAS ON THE ORIGIN OF JOHNNY BLAZE

He never wrote the character, but he is nonetheless a key contributor to the hell-cycling character we all love. Veteran comic writer and former Marvel Editor-in-Chief Roy Thomas was in on the development of Ghost Rider at its very inception along with writer Gary Friedrich and artist Mike Ploog, and he visited with *Spotlight* to give us the score on how that all came about!

SPOTLIGHT: In the early '70s, Marvel was now finally able to start up in earnest a line of supernaturally based comics. Can you give a little background on how you were able to do that?

ROY: In about 1971, after Stan's Spider-Man "drug issues" [*Amazing Spider-Man #96-98*], the Comics Code decided it was time to update the code so that it could be a little closer to reality and not the world of 1954 where it was written. For instance, it was silly to say you can't use a werewolf or you can't have a vampire. There might be certain elements or certain stories you couldn't do, but just to stay "No vampires no werewolves" was kinda silly.

In the old days, the strengths of the horror comics had been the O. Henry shock endings or general monster stories with relatively few continuing characters. Marvel's strength was the continuing character. We thought it was best to make regular characters, so we had Stan start up with Dracula. I made up Werewolf by Night. We had a number of other characters. For almost every kind of sub-genre in the horror field, we had a representative: we had a zombie, we had a couple of vampires, a couple of werewolves.

SPOTLIGHT: At what point did Ghost Rider, the flaming headed motorcyclist, enter?

ROY: Strangely enough, that wasn't intended originally to be a supernatural character. Gary Friedrich had taken over the writing of *Daredevil* when I had to give it up, and became the third writer of *Daredevil*. I had previously created a character called the Stunt Master; he wasn't much of a character, just a motorcycling, stunt riding criminal. And Gary thought, "What if we made up a new character with the name Ghost Rider who was a motorcycle rider?" [After developing the idea], we took it to Stan right away. I can't remember but I must have been thinking in terms of giving him his own book right away, because otherwise we wouldn't have had to give it to Stan. We would have just introduced him as a hero in *Daredevil*. But Stan liked the idea,

and somewhere along the line, whether it was Stan's suggestion or just a natural outgrowth, he ended up being a supernatural character. There was no reason to not have him be one in that day and age once he was going to be the hero of his own book. And Gary became the writer.

We decided Mike Ploog had been doing all these monstery things, so we thought he should be the artist. When he was called in, he thought at first that we were talking about the western character, but quickly learned it was a motorcycle guy. Mike came in and we began designing the character; we had some ideas in mind. Gary was out sick that day and didn't show up, and so Mike and I worked out the thing visually. My main contribution was that I wanted him to have this skull head and to be dressed in black leather.

SPOTLIGHT: What inspired the black leather costume?

ROY: Gary and I knew each other for years down in Missouri before we came to New York. We both have always been big fans of Elvis Presley since back in the 50s. In 1968 we had watched together when Elvis made this big comeback special. Elvis was in this sort of jumpsuit made of black leather, which was probably partly in style because of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. I told Mike that I wanted Ghost Rider to wear something like that. Mike said that he does have that look, that in his mind it was based partly on John Wayne and his old westerns and the kind of outfits he wore. It was a nice combination so he became a very good visual character.

Mike had this idea of adding the flames in the head...I thought that looked great! He just started drawing it and I said, "What's that?" He said, "I just thought he'd look better if his head was on fire." Gary thought that was great. He wrote it and it became kind of a hit and it's come back a couple of times since then. Stan named the character Johnny Blaze. We didn't like that too much because we already had a character named Johnny Starr, but if Stan wanted him named Johnny Blaze, Johnny Blaze he was!

SPOTLIGHT: It's amazing how that incidental decision that Mike Ploog made has turned into the key element to this iconic character.

ROY: I thought that really helped because it just gives it that extra devilishness. If your head's on fire, you can't just be the normal guy!

SPOTLIGHT: So do you have any thoughts about the character and comic as the movie is about to arrive in theaters?

ROY: It's kind of weird that Ghost Rider will be a movie starring Nicolas Cage, who took his name from a Marvel character that I named [*Luke Cage, natch!*]. And, of course, he was married for a time to Lisa Marie Presley, and the costume Ghost Rider was originally designed to wear was inspired by that Elvis outfit. It's a very weird connection, so maybe there are some satanic, ritualistic things going on here. *(Laughter.)*

IT'S GHOST RIDER, BUT WITH A KETCH!

First, there was Johnny Blaze. Then, there was Dan Ketch. And if the '90s was your generation, the latter is probably what springs to mind when you think of Ghost Rider. BY MATT ADLER

From 1990 to 1998, it was Dan Ketch that ruled the roads whenever he transformed into the leather-wearing, chain-swinging, hellfire-spewing Spirit of Vengeance. Although Johnny Blaze has since reclaimed the mantle of Ghost Rider, many of Ketch's influences can still be seen today, particularly the visual aspects, both in the new series by Daniel Way, Mark Texeira and Javier Saltares, and the upcoming movie directed by Mark Steven Johnson. *Spotlight* now takes a look back at that fan-favorite series, in a talk with Dan Ketch's creator, writer Howard Mackie. Howard gained a reputation on the series for combining personal, down-to-earth, and character-minded stories with the fantastic, otherworldly character that was Ghost Rider, and in this extensive interview he gives Spotlight readers some valuable insight into the process that not only made Dan Ketch an instant hit, but one of the most resonant incarnations of Ghost Riders of all.

SPOTLIGHT: How did the revival of Ghost Rider come about, and how did you get picked for it?

HOWARD MACKIE: The birth of the *Ghost Rider* series featuring Dan Ketch almost did not happen, several times. Back in the late '80s, I was still an editor up at Marvel. Tom DeFalco was the Editor-in-Chief and Mark Gruenwald was his executive editor. They were looking to make some changes and additions to Marvel's publishing plan, and one of the things they were looking to do (and I was not aware of this at the time) was bring a *Ghost Rider* book back. Hands down, the Ghost Rider character is one of the most striking visuals in comic books, and that's what they wanted. Apparently, they had contacted a number of creators to revise Ghost Rider with little success. Mark, who was my mentor when I started out at Marvel, was aware that Ghost Rider was one of my favorite Marvel characters and suggested that I submit a pitch for the series. The caveat I was given was that it had to be something completely new. This meant no Johnny Blaze. I wasn't a big fan of that restriction, but decided to go ahead and submit something. I did, and they liked it. I had to do lots and lots of retooling, and it was assigned to an editor (Bobbie Chase). I did more retooling, and it looked like the series was going to be a go. That is when the marketing and sales department got involved, and the series almost didn't happen.

Tom DeFalco was told outright by the head of sales that Ghost Rider would never work as an ongoing series: maybe, just maybe, it could work as a graphic novel. So, I was sent back to my original pitch and retooled it as a one-shot graphic novel. Sales got involved again. We were informed that the graphic novel was dead. We should try it as a limited series... more retooling. (I am sure you can see were this is going...) We retooled that original pitch a good half dozen times to fit every possible format in which comics might be printed.

Finally, Tom DeFalco just had enough and decided he liked the project enough to approve it as an ongoing series. Everyone expected it to be dead in four issues. I know of at least one top Marvel creator who walked past Bobbie's office, heard her speaking about Ghost Rider, and sneered, "They're bring that back again?"

Needless to say, the book didn't die in four issues. Oh...and we far outsold the sneering creator's project with the debut issue, and a few after that!

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned being a fan of *GR* even prior to taking on the series. What was it that attracted you to the character?

HOWARD: First and foremost, as I said, I think Ghost Rider is one of the most visually interesting characters in comic books. The flaming skull, the motorcycle, the leather, the chains: these all appealed to the wannabe bad boy Howard who grew up in Brooklyn. It was the visual that got me reaching for the comic book first. Then there was the conflicted nature of Johnny Blaze, who was always struggling for control over a demon that had been grafted onto his soul. Let's not forget the "making a deal with the devil" thing. There was so much to the book and to the character, and when Mark DeMatteis wrapped up the series I was simply blown away.

SPOTLIGHT: *GR* was your first major writing assignment, if I'm not mistaken; what was it like making the jump from editorial to writing?

HOWARD: What? You don't think writing the adventures of *Chuck Norris and His Karate Kommandoes* was a major writing assignment? Seriously, the first thing I wrote for Marvel was *Iron Man #211*, and that seemed pretty major at the time. I was getting pretty regular work from that point on, but *Ghost Rider* was my first regular series, and for a while I did both edit and write comics for Marvel. So, the transition was not too abrupt.

> "WHEN I STARTED THE GHOST RIDER SERIES I WANTED TO SEE IF I COULD HAVE THE BOOK AND THE CHARACTERS WALK DOWN VERY SPECIAL-AND VERY DARK-STREETS THAT WERE FIRMLY ROOTED IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE."

Here's the thing: you learn more about editing, and certainly about being a good editor, by sitting on the other side of the desk more than anything else I can think of. Back when I started at Marvel, both Jim Shooter (then editor in chief) and Mark Gruenwald (to whom I was an assistant) insisted that every editor write (or draw) at least one issue of a comic book. I think that's a good idea. I know I would be a far better editor today than I was back then.

SPOTLIGHT: Your job was to build a new Ghost Rider from the ground up by moving away from what had been previously established with Johnny Blaze. How would you describe Danny Ketch, the new host for the Ghost Rider?

HOWARD: There was a lot of *me* in Dan Ketch. He was a just a normal kid growing up in Brooklyn, who, through a series of extraordinary circumstances is thrust into a world he is barely aware exists. I grew up in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn, in an area surrounded by cemeteries. My father died when I was 7 years old and my mother raised me.

Here's a little trivia that I've never mentioned in interviews before: back when I was creating my *Ghost Rider* series, two major things occurred in my life. First, my eldest daughter was born. This was the best thing that had ever happened to me. Second, one month later I was diagnosed with cancer. That was the scariest thing that had ever happened to me. Within the span of a month I got to experience a sense of immortality (in my little girl) and a crushing sense of mortality. Both of these things strongly influenced every aspect of *Ghost Rider*. I think about so many elements of the stories, the characters I created, and I can trace them back to those two life-changing experiences.

SPOTLIGHT: Where did the name Dan Ketch originate from?

HOWARD: Well, funny you should ask. Back when I was first creating the book, I wanted the name to have some relevance to the character of Ghost Rider. So, I did a bunch of research and discovered that Jack Ketch was the name of a 17th century executioner who was renowned for making his victims suffer. Eventually the name went on to be mythic for a hangman; you know, the final guy who metes out *vengeance*!!! Well, it was decided that Jack Ketch didn't sound right – too much like Jackketch. So he became Dan...and Jack went over to his best friend's name.

SPOTLIGHT: What prompted the revelation of Johnny Blaze and Dan Ketch as brothers, and how long had you had that in mind?

HOWARD: Once I knew I was going to be able to bring Blaze into my series all the pieces started to fall into place. It just seemed like a natural.

SPOTLIGHT: The series became wildly popular, spawning a number of spin-offs, and even an entire line, *Midnight Sons. GR* became so popular that he was satirized in Walt Simonson's *Fantastic Four* run as part of the "New Fantastic Four" (or, "The World's Most Commercialest Comic Magazine" as the tagline went). What do you think was in the recipe that made the revival take off like this?

HOWARD: The series came out of nowhere, and it was like nothing else that Marvel was doing at the time. In the beginning, since no one expected it to succeed, I was allowed to pretty much do what I wanted to do. Plus – and I think this is a very important point – it was not a horror book. I made a real effort in the first half year to make Ghost Rider the only supernatural element in the book. There were characters that could have had mutant powers, we had a wannabe vampire, but there were no otherworldly elements besides Ghost Rider. That was the way I wanted the book to continue, but it became a victim of it's own popularity. Everyone, including people who initially scoffed at the book, wanted to have Ghost Rider as a guest-star. Plus, we went from a publishing plan that believed that the horror genre could not succeed in the mainstream comic book marketplace, to one that could not see past the flaming skull and dollar signs.

SPOTLIGHT: So, being that *GR* was not a horror book, what genre would you classify it as?

HOWARD: Obviously there are elements of horror to *Ghost Rider*, but that was not what I was shooting for. When I started the *Ghost Rider* series I wanted to see if I could have the book and the characters walk down very special – and very dark – streets that were firmly rooted in the Marvel Universe. I wanted Ghost Rider to be the only horror element set amidst the super-hero genre that was Marvel's bread and butter. Looking over the stories, I guess that all started to change when I brought Dr. Strange into a story [in *GR Vol. 2 #11*] and then certainly when the *Midnight Sons* were launched. But, I still tried to have Ghost Rider going up against other types of villains set in the Marvel Universe.

SPOTLIGHT: Did having a main character that might have had trouble blending in (flaming skull, hellfire, motorcycle, etc.) present storytelling problems to in ways that other heroes, like Spider-Man, didn't?

HOWARD: Those things created opportunities, or challenges maybe, but they were never problems. We used to discuss this amongst ourselves back in my days up at Marvel. When writing a story you wanted to always maintain the "wow" factor whenever someone saw a character like Ghost Rider, but you also had to be aware that these stories were set in a world that acknowledges the existence of mutants, of costumed super-heroes, of alien invasions, etc...I don't think that Spider-Man did blend in that much more than Ghost Rider. To the average guy on the street, Ghost Rider could have been just another costumed mutant with some really cool special effects.

SPOTLIGHT: What was your favorite *GR* story that you wrote?

HOWARD: Yeah...which of my kids do I like the best, right? Tough question. I still have a soft spot in my heart for that first issue – that first bunch of issues. The writing was a little rough around the edges, but it was all me. Then...I loved the Scarecrow stories (see my cancer references and go back to reread those), and I really liked the very beginning of the *Midnight Sons* stuff. Skinner was a very interesting character to write.

SPOTLIGHT: Later writers made some changes to Danny's backstory/origin, and you yourself weighed in on this during your *Peter Parker Spider-Man* run, I believe. What was your ultimate intent?

HOWARD: Okay, I want to clarify something: I had no issue with what was written after I left the series. Actually, I didn't read any of it. I know nothing about the Noble Kale stuff. My editor on the *Spider-Man* series came to me after *Ghost Rider* was canceled, and asked me to write a story that left Ghost Rider (and Dan) in a position that could be picked up at a later date. There really was no vendetta on my part – it was simply trying to clean up some dangling continuity. That's it.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of which, you were on the Spider-books for quite a while as well, carrying over the down-to-earth approach you used on *Ghost Rider* with some memorable gang-war storylines (Name of the Rose, Jimmy Six, Fortunato). Which series did you prefer writing, *GR* or *Spider-Man*, and why?

HOWARD: Getting to write the various Spider-Man comics was a dream job. I was always a fan, and got to play around with a character that I had read for years. Having said that, writing *Ghost Rider* made my career in comics, writing *Spider-Man* ended it. (Can anyone say Clone Saga?) So, I guess my answer to your question is...*Ghost Rider*!

SPOTLIGHT: Have you seen or heard anything about the upcoming movie, and if so, what do you think?

HOWARD: I *finally* got to see the trailers to the movie, and I loved them! I recently was in communication with [writer/director] Mark Steven Johnson and told him how much I liked the trailers. It was like looking at every single comic book story I have ever read, written, or imagined, all come to life on the screen. I recognized panels and pages from books I wrote on the screen. Mark mentioned that even though the movie is about Johnny Blaze, there are lots of Dan Ketch stories in it. It was also very cool to see Caretaker (a character I created) on the screen. Funny thing is that I had always imagined Sam Eliot in the role. Anyway, I am looking forward to seeing the movie.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you get a kick out of the fact that the visuals and tone for the current interpretation of the character, both in the movies and comics, are heavily based on your version?

HOWARD: Yes I do.

SPOTLIGHT: What are you doing nowadays? Any plans in comics?

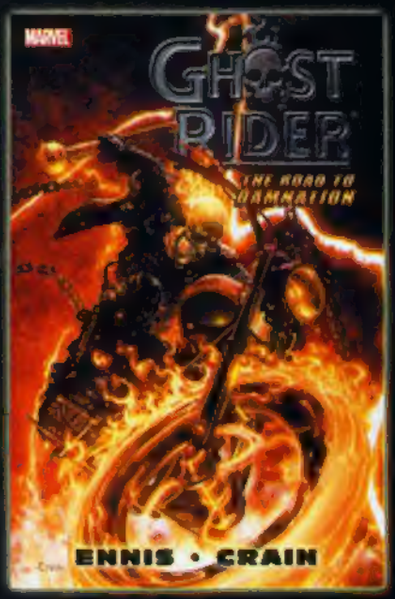
HOWARD: Trying to make ends meet and keeping my head above water. In between doing consulting work for a sub-division of the Department of Homeland Security which is seeking to keep the U.S.A. safe from demonic terrorists, and working for a web start up called Departmentofvengeance.com, I have been sitting by the phone waiting patiently for an editor from Marvel to call and ask me to revive Dan Ketch! The phone isn't ringing. Might be a good thing, since it's probably being tapped.

Many thanks to Howard for the revealing and insightful interview! If you're interested in reading up on Dan Ketch and a whole decade's worth of GHOST RIDER comics, hit the back issue bins of your local comic shop or online retailer! Also, look for the GHOST RIDER: RESURRECTED TPB, which reprints the first seven issues of Howard's GHOST RIDER series starring Dan Ketch, with art by Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira. This collection is still available through Marvel's backlist, so now that you know the story behind the story, go get the story and read the story!

The Spirit of Vengeance Rides Again in These Ghost Rider Collections!

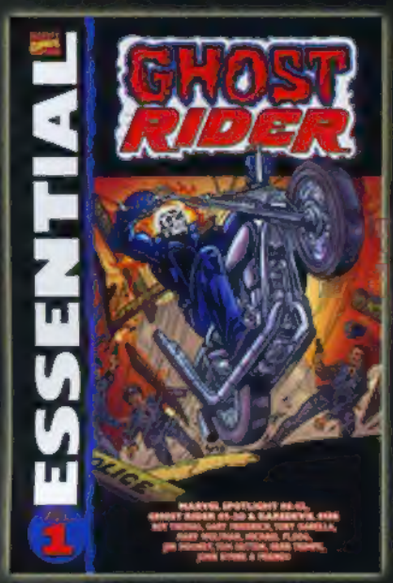
GHOST RIDER TEAM-UP TPB
(DEC062385)
144 PGS./Rated T+ ...$15.99
ISBN: 0-7851-2257-5

GHOST RIDER: ROAD TO DAMNATION TPB
(NOV062363)
144 PGS./Parental Advisory ...$14.99
ISBN: 0-7851-2122-6



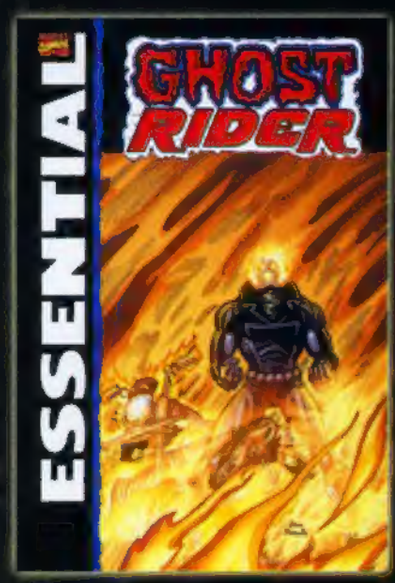
GHOST RIDER VOL. 1: VICIOUS CYCLE TPB
(NOV062364)
120 PGS./Rated T+ ...$13.99
ISBN: 0-7851-2296-6

CHAMPIONS CLASSIC VOL. 2 TPB
(NOV062362)
216 PGS./Rated A ...$19.99
ISBN: 0-7851-2098-X



ESSENTIAL GHOST RIDER VOL. 1 TPB
(JUL051937)
560 PGS./Rated T+ ...$16.99
ISBN: 0-7851-1838-1

ESSENTIAL GHOST RIDER VOL. 2 TPB
(NOV062377)
568 PGS./Rated T+ ...$16.99
ISBN: 0-7851-2164-1



To find these and other Marvel products at a local comic shop, call 1-888-comicbook

MARVEL

TM & © 2007 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved.

GHOST RIDER: TRAIL OF TEARS
ENNIS • CRAIN
FEBRUARY 2007

GHOST RIDER #8
WAY • SALTARES • TEXEIRA
COVER BY ARTHUR SUYDAM
FEBRUARY 2007